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# FAME AND FORTUNE

STORIES OF BOYS

# WEEKLY.

WHO MAKE MONEY.

## BORN TO GOOD LUCK; OR THE BOY WHO SUCCEEDED.

*By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



Confident of his own strength and agility, Dick left Miss Nesbitt's side, and started for the struggling group. He felled the foremost assailant with a stunning blow under the ear; and the boy could hit out mighty hard.

# Fame and Fortune Weekly

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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## BORN TO GOOD LUCK;

OR

## The Boy Who Succeeded.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE SCRAP AT COHAM'S CORNER.

"See here, Dick Armstrong; when you've taken that water into the house, I want you to clean these. Do you understand?"

The speaker, a sallow-complexioned, overgrown boy of seventeen, threw a pair of mud-bespattered boots at the feet of a sun-burned, healthy-looking lad about a year his junior, while a grin of satisfied malice wrinkled his not over-pleasant features as he thrust his hands into his pockets and started to walk away.

"Who are you talking to, Luke Maslin?" answered Dick, hotly, not relishing the contemptuous manner in which he had been addressed.

"Why, you, of course," replied Luke, with a sneer, pausing about a yard away. "You're dad's boy-of-all-work, aren't you?"

Unfortunately for Dick this remark expressed the exact truth.

He was Silas Maslin's boy-of-all-work, and his lot was not an enviable one.

His clothes were bad, his food scarce, his education neglected, and having arrived at the age of sixteen years he eagerly longed to cut loose from his uncongenial surroundings and make his own way in the world.

If Dick felt obliged to submit to Mr. Maslin's tyrannical treatment, that was no reason, he contended, who he should allow his son Luke to bully him also.

Although he had never done anything to deserve Luke Maslin's ill will and often went out of his way to do him a good turn, Luke never lost a chance to make life miserable for Dick.

In fact, all friendly advances on Armstrong's part, instead of winning his favor, seemed rather to impress him with the idea that Dick was afraid of him, which was far from the truth.

On this particular occasion Dick was not in the best of humor, for Mr. Maslin had just been savagely abusing him because he had taken a longer time than the old man had considered necessary to fetch certain supplies for the store from Slocum, a large town about ten miles distant. So when Luke flung the last remark at him he angrily retorted:

"Well, I'm not yours, at any rate."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Luke, in a disagreeable tone.

"Just what I said!" answered Dick, defiantly.

"Do you mean to say that you don't intend to do anything I ask you to do?"

"That depends."

"Depends on what?"

Luke advanced a step nearer the other, looking decidedly ugly.

"How you ask me," replied Dick, setting down the pail to relieve his arm.

"I s'pose you'd like me to take my hat off to you, Dick Armstrong, and say please, and all that," Luke returned, scowling darkly. "It strikes me you're putting on too many frills for a charity boy."

Charity boy!

This slur, which Dick felt to be utterly undeserved, stung him more than anything Luke could have said.

He turned pale with sudden rage, and his temper burst forth with a violence all the more terrible because held so long in check.

Snatching up the pail of water as though it were a feather, he dashed its contents over his tormentor, drenching him from head to foot.

If the heavens had fallen, Luke Maslin couldn't have been more astonished.

That Dick Armstrong, the despised factotum of the establishment, would dare to resent any aggression on his part was something Luke had not dreamed of.

Heretofore when he chose to bully his father's drudge the boy had submitted with the best grace he could.

Now Dick actually had the temerity not only to resist, but to assume the offensive.

After the first sputtering gasp of surprise, Luke recovered himself and sprang at Dick with a howl of the fury that fairly blazed from his eyes.

Realizing that he was in for trouble, Armstrong prepared to defend himself to the best of his ability.

Although his opponent had the advantage of him in height and was furious enough to be dangerous, Dick was not troubled with any misgivings as to the result of a clash between them.

He had every confidence in his own powers, for he was compactly built, was unusually strong for his years, and moreover, being very angry, was reckless of the consequences.

Whether it was that Maslin was naturally clever with his fists or Dick was awkward or slow in putting himself into a posture of defence, certain it is Luke's right arm went through his opponent's guard and Dick received a stinging blow on the side of his head that staggered him for a moment.

A second whack, this time on the chest, thoroughly aroused Dick and, seeing his chance, he struck out with all the force he was capable of and caught Luke full on the nose.

His head went back with a jerk, he slipped on the grass, and was down in a moment, the blood flowing freely from his injured organ.

Contrary to Dick's expectations, Luke made no effort to get up and resume the battle.

It began to look as though that one blow had knocked all the fight out of him.

Whatever satisfaction his opponent felt at such a deci-

sive result was dissipated in a moment by an unexpected whack on the ear from behind, and turning to confront this new danger he found himself face to face with Silas Maslin, who was in a towering rage.

"You young rascal, how dare you strike my son!" he exclaimed, furiously.

"He struck me first," Dick answered doggedly, rubbing his ear, for the slap had been no gentle one.

"What's that? Didn't I see you fling that bucket of water over him, you little villain?"

"I did that because he insulted me," replied the boy, with spirit.

"Don't you dare talk back to me in that fashion, or I'll flay you within an inch of your life! Go into the store at once!"

Silas Maslin raised his foot as though it was his intention to boot the boy.

He did not do so, however, and it was well for him that he did not.

That was an indignity Dick would not have submitted to from any person, not even from Silas Maslin, much as he held him in awe.

The boy was glad to avail himself of the chance of getting beyond his tyrant's reach, and was presently drawing a quart of molasses for one of the customers of the establishment.

Mr. Maslin kept a small general store at Cobham's Corner, on the outskirts of the village of Walkhill, in the State of New York.

The building stood within a few yards of the Erie Canal, facing the country road, which at this point crossed the narrow waterway by means of a stout wooden bridge.

The houses that constituted the village were much scattered, and owing to the heavy growth of trees not one of them could be seen from the store; but by standing on the centre of the bridge the short, stumpy steeple of the small, wooden church could just be made out looming up through the topmost branches in the near distance.

The post-office was located at the store, and the farmers for miles around came here for their mail and to replenish their supplies from Mr. Maslin's stock of goods, which consisted of about everything needed by the little community, from a needle to a cultivator.

Mr. Maslin's household consisted of his wife, a sour-faced woman on the shady side of forty; his son Luke; John Huskins, a hired man, who attended to the main part of the work in the fields—for Silas Maslin had some forty acres under cultivation—and Dick Armstrong, who helped in the store when necessary, did the chores, and assisted Huskins.

Between the two boys, Luke had all the advantages of the situation.

He went to school as long as school kept, took part in all the village sports, visited his schoolmates, attended all the social gatherings he felt disposed to join, and carried his head pretty high generally.

But for all that he wasn't at all popular.

Dick, on the other hand, came in for the short end of everything.

He attended school when Silas Maslin chose to let him do so, under which circumstances his attendance was decidedly irregular.

For the larger part of his time from daylight to dark he was kept on the hustle, as Mr. Maslin was never at a loss to find something for him to do.

Everybody knew Dick Armstrong, of course.

He was a good-looking boy, naturally bright, was obliging and polite to everybody with whom he came in contact, and consequently was well liked by everybody in the district, and was an especial favorite with the girls, who when they came to the store for mail or to purchase something preferred to have him wait upon them.

As Luke was ambitious to shine with the fair sex himself, he resented their partiality for Dick, and as he couldn't very well get square with the young ladies, he vented his ill humor and spite on the object of their attention.

## CHAPTER II.

### ACCUSED OF THEFT.

As the customer departed with the jug of molasses, a lad named Joe Fletcher entered the store.

"Hello, Dick," said the newcomer, walking toward the rear of the place.

"Hello, Joe," replied Dick, in a pleased voice, for he and Joe were chums.

"I didn't know whether I should find you in here or not," said Joe.

"Want to see me about anything particular?" asked Dick, in some surprise.

"Yes. I've come to say goodbye."

"What!" exclaimed Dick, his face clouding. "You don't mean to say you're going away?"

"Yes. I left Boggs for good a couple of hours ago. He's a hard, cruel, grasping tyrant—that's what he is. You know I threatened to cut loose from him weeks ago, but somehow I didn't seem to be able to muster up the backbone to do it. But it's all over now. He beat me black and blue with a whip this morning because one of the cows broke down the corner of the pasture fence and got into the truck patch. I think he'd have killed me only I hit him over the head with the handle of a rake. Then I got my clothes and ran away."

For a moment Dick was silent.

He felt sad at the thought of losing the best friend he had in the neighborhood.

It is true he had only known Joe Fletcher five months, which was about the length of time Joe had been working for Farmer Boggs, but a natural sympathy had drawn the two boys together.

Both early in life had been thrown upon their own resources, and both were subservient to hard taskmasters, though if there was any choice in the matter, Silas Maslin was perhaps a shade better than Nathan Boggs.

The latter was notorious throughout the county for the

way he treated his hired help, particularly if that help happened to be a boy.

Boggs' method was to hire a stout boy or an able-bodied, newly arrived foreigner for a period of six months, with the understanding that if the hand quit work before the end of the stipulated term of service he was to forfeit all his pay.

The farmer then managed to make things so hard for his help as the weeks went by that they found the place simply unendurable and were glad to disappear of a sudden without making any very serious demand for what was due them.

Fletcher had managed to weather the ills that clung about Boggs' farm for five months, for he was blessed with a good temper and much patience, and Nathan, fearing the boy would last the limit and that he would be obliged to pay him the sum of \$60 for which he had contracted, adopted a specially rigorous line of conduct toward him, which culminated that morning with a most inhuman beating, after which Joe gave up the struggle.

"Where are you going?" asked Dick, at length.

"I haven't decided yet but the canal-boat Minnehaha is taking on a load of shingles at Norton's Lock, a few miles above, and Captain Beasley told me he'd take me down to New York if I wanted to go."

"I wish I were going with you, Joe," said Dick, wistfully.

"I wish you were."

"I'm sick of this place. They treat me like a dog, and I won't stand it much longer. Had a run-in with Luke a little while ago."

"I don't see that it's doing you any good to hang on here," said Joe. "Maslin hasn't any claim on you, has he?"

"Not a bit; it's all the other way. He hasn't paid me a cent all these years I've been working for him. All I've ever got has been the clothes he grudgingly gave me—none of the best, at that—and my board, and I guess you know what sort of a table they set here."

"I've heard enough from you to make me believe it isn't much of an improvement on Boggs' bill of fare—and that's about the worst ever!"

"You never told me how you came to live with the Maslins," said Joe, curiously.

"I didn't know myself till a couple of months ago."

"Is that a fact?" said Joe in surprise.

"I asked Mr. Maslin and his wife a number of times, but they never would give me any satisfaction. About two months ago I was up in the garret one rainy Sunday afternoon, and I found an old diary in which Mr. Maslin kept a record of important matters in which he was interested when we lived up in New Hampshire some twelve years ago. I've a faint recollection myself of the farm he owned in the neighborhood of a place called Franconia. In this diary I found a long entry relating to myself."

"You must have been surprised," said Fletcher, who was listening eagerly.

"Well, I guess I was. Of course I knew I was no rela-

tion of the Maslins, for they had long since taken care to impress that fact on me. The diary states that a gentleman named George Armstrong, whom Mr. Maslin wrote down as being tall and fine-looking, but with a melancholy face, as though he was in trouble or had lately been subject to some misfortune, boarded at the farm with his little son, Richard, at that time aged five years, for several months. That one day he received a letter which Mr. Maslin noticed bore the Boston postmark, and that its contents disturbed him very much. He immediately started off without mentioning his destination, leaving the little boy in Mr. Maslin's care, with a small sum of money to pay his board for about the time he expected to be away. He did not return within the time he set, and from subsequent entries on the same page it would seem that Mr. Maslin never saw him again."

"It's a good thing you learned that much about yourself. I suppose something must have happened to your father or he would have come back after you," said Joe.

"I suppose so," replied Dick, soberly.

"What did you do with the diary?"

"I've got it in the box where I keep my clothes."

"You'd better hold on to it. Might possibly be of value to you one of these days."

"It has a value for me, as it shows to some extent who I am," replied Dick. "Luke called me a charity boy, and that taunt caused the scrap. I've worked like a slave for the Maslins without pay, but I've received any amount of abuse. Some morning Mr. Maslin will get up and find me missing."

"What's that you say, you young villain?" yelled the strident tones of the storekeeper, behind them.

He had entered the store and approached them unobserved.

"Don't you let me catch you tryin' to light out of here before I give you leave, or I'll be the death of you. What do you mean, anyway, by hangin' over the counter and idlin' your time away when there's a dozen things you might be doin'? Go into the kitchen now and peel the taters for Mrs. Maslin; d'ye hear?" And he seized the boy roughly by the arm and swung him into the middle of the store.

"I'll try and see you later, Dick, before I go," said Joe, holding out his hand to his chum.

"I don't think you will, young man," said Silas Maslin, significantly. "My help hain't got no time to waste on visitors."

"I guess he's got a right to say good-bye to a friend," retorted Joe, indignantly.

"Then he'd better say it right now afore you go," said the storekeeper, ungraciously.

"Well, Dick," said Joe, bottling up his wrath, for he realized that Mr. Maslin was master of the situation, "good-bye, if I don't see you again."

"Good-bye, Joe," and the two boys clasped hands sadly.

"I'll write to you and let you know where I am and what I'm doing," said Joe.

"I hope you will. Be sure I sha'n't forget you."

"And I won't forget you."

And thus the two boys parted, for how long they could not guess.

As it proved, however, they were shortly to be reunited in a somewhat startling way.

Dick went into the kitchen, where Mrs. Maslin handed him a tub of potatoes and a knife.

"Take the jackets off 'em, and see you lose no time 'bout it nuther," said the lady of the house sharply.

Dick made no reply, but seated himself on a stool in a corner and began his work.

"You 'most ruined Luke's new suit of clothes this afternoon," snapped Mrs. Maslin. "Ef I wuz Silas I'd take it out'r your hide. It seems to me my boy can't ask you to do the simplest thing for him eny more but you must fly at him."

Dick knew it was useless to enter into any explanation with her.

Luke had evidently told the story in his own way, and whatever he might say now wouldn't count.

"Don't you know it's your place to do whatever he asks of you?" asked Mrs. Maslin, shrilly.

"I've never refused to do anything for him when he asked me civilly," said Dick.

"Hoightly toighty!" exclaimed the lady, sarcastically. "Must my boy bow down before you, you young whipper-snapper? The idea! Who are you enyway? Ef it hadn't been for Silas and me, where'd you been now, you ungrateful cub? We've clothed you and fed you and eddicated you, and now you turn on us."

"I think I've worked pretty hard for all I've received," replied Dick, doggedly.

"What ef you have? It ain't more'n you ought to do. You've finished the taters, hev you? Put 'em down, then, and don't stare at me in that way. Go out and fetch me a pail of water."

Dick obeyed without a word and then, as the mistress made no further demand on his services for the moment, went up to his bare little room just over the kitchen.

He opened the box where he kept his things and, diving down into a corner, fished up a small buckskin bag in which he kept the pennies, dimes, quarters, and several half-dollars he had been slowly accumulating from odd jobs he had done for various persons during the last three or four years.

He counted his little store slowly over.

"I've a great mind to——"

He never finished that sentence, for suddenly the door was thrown open with a bang and Silas Maslin rushed furiously into the room.

"You thief! Give me back the money you took from the store-till this afternoon!"

"This is not your money," said Dick, dropping the coins into the bag and holding it behind him.

"I'll see whether you'll give it to me or not!"

As Silas Maslin sprang at him Dick thrust the bag into his pocket and proceeded to defend himself as well as he could.

This would not have been an easy job, for Mr. Maslin was strong and wiry; but chance aided the boy.

The storekeeper's foot caught on a rent in the rag-carpet, he pitched forward and struck his forehead against a corner of Dick's box with such force as to cause a nasty wound that stretched him, stunned, on the floor.

### CHAPTER III.

#### LEAVING HIS HOME.

At that moment Mrs. Maslin appeared in the doorway and, perceiving her husband stretched motionless on the floor with the blood streaming down his face and Dick Armstrong standing over him in an attitude of defence with his fists half clenched—for the mishap which had overtaken Silas Maslin had been so sudden that he stood quite stupefied with surprise—she conceived the idea that the boy had struck down her lord and master, perhaps killed him.

“Help! Help! Murder!” she screamed loudly, dashing open the window and making the air ring with her shrill cry.

Huskins, the hired man, was coming into the yard from the fields.

He heard Mrs. Maslin's frenzied cries, saw her violent gesticulations as she leaned out of the window, and thinking the house was on fire, he dropped the implements he was carrying and ran forward.

In the meantime Dick had raised Silas Maslin to a sitting posture and was trying to stanch the blood with a corner of the coverlet which belonged to his bed, when Mrs. Maslin turned around and saw what he was doing.

“Don't you dare touch him again, you young villain!” she screamed, suddenly attacking the boy with her bony fists.

“What's the matter with you?” objected Dick, trying to ward off her blows. “Why don't you get some water and try to bring him to? What do you mean by pounding me in that way?”

“You ruffian! You murderer! I knowed you was born to be hanged!” yelled the excited woman, thumping the boy about the head and arms till he had to retreat out of her reach to save himself, for he had no idea of striking back at her.

Then she grabbed her husband in her sinewy arms and started to drag him from the room just as Huskins appeared on the scene and stared in astonishment at what he saw.

“Don't let that boy escape, John!” cried Mrs. Maslin. “He's made a murderous attack on Silas, and ef he hasn't killed him it'll be a great wonder.”

“You don't mean Dick, ma'am?” exclaimed Huskins, in evident wonder.

“I don't mean nobuddy else,” snapped his mistress, sharply. “Tie him up so he can't get away, and then run for the constable. Lands sake! It's a wonder we haven't all been killed in our beds afore this! I never knowed he was such a desprit boy.”

Mrs. Maslin then bore Silas into her own chamber in

the front of the house, and set about bringing him to his senses.

“What's up?” asked Huskins of Dick.

He had always liked the boy and didn't know what to make of the situation.

“Mr. Maslin came up here and accused me of taking money out of his till in the store, and when I denied it he started to seize me, when his foot caught in that hole in the carpet and he pitched forward, striking his head against the corner of my box and cutting his forehead open. The shock must have stunned him. Then Mrs. Maslin appeared, threw up the window and began yelling like a crazy person. I tried to do something for Mr. Maslin, but she attacked me furiously, calling me a ruffian and a murderer, and I don't remember what else. I tell you, John, things are getting altogether too hot for me here. Between Luke and the rest of them I am having a dog's life of it. I might as well get out now as at any other time.”

“I shouldn't blame you if you did. I should, if it was me,” replied Huskins, who knew what a hard time the boy had of it and really pitied him.

“I don't believe Mr. Maslin has lost any money,” said Dick, indignantly. “I know I didn't take any. I'm not a thief.”

“Maybe Luke took it,” suggested the hired man, with a peculiar wink.

“Luke!” exclaimed Dick in surprise. “What makes you think he did?”

“Well, he wanted five dollars mighty bad this morning, for he tried to borrow it of me. I asked him what he wanted it for, but he wouldn't tell me. I guess he wants to send for something he's seen advertised in the paper.”

“How do you know he does?”

“From something he said to me the other day,” said Huskins, sagely.

“If Luke took the money, he'll deny it, all right. His father will take his word before mine, and his mother will back him up as she's done fifty times before. I've got a few dollars saved up, and as Mr. Maslin has discovered that fact he won't rest till he's got it away from me. I need that to help me out after I leave here. So I guess I'd better go before Mr. Maslin gets his hands on it.”

“You're right there, Dick. The old man's fingers are like pot-hooks—they hold on to everything they fasten to. Once he gets possession of your money, you'll never see it again.”

“You'd better go down and look out for the store, John, till Mr. Maslin turns up. I'm going to make a bundle of my things and start off.”

“Then you're really determined to go, Dick?”

“Yes,” replied the boy, resolutely, “I am. Mr. Maslin has called me a thief, and that's the limit with me.”

“Well, I wish you luck. Let me hear from you some time. I'd like to know how yet get on,” and the hired man held out his hand.

“Thank you, John. I sha'n't forget you.”

They shook hands, and Huskins went down stairs.

Dick closed his room-door and pushed the chest of drawers against it, as he did not want to be interrupted or taken at a disadvantage.

Then he put on his best suit, made a compact bundle of such articles as he deemed indispensable, put Mr. Maslin's old diary into an inside pocket of his jacket, and was ready to leave the house.

He was about to remove the chest of drawers when he heard the unmistakable voice of Silas Maslin mingled with the shriller tones of Mrs. Maslin, on the landing approaching his door.

His retreat by the stairway was evidently cut off.

What was he to do?

The door of his room was pushed in an inch or two, as far as the obstruction would permit.

"Open the door, you young villain!" exclaimed the voice of Silas Maslin, whose temper had by no means been improved by the injury he had received.

"Push the door in, Silas," said his wife. "There ain't no lock to it."

"He's got somethin' against it," replied her husband, impatiently.

"Mebbe it's the chest of drawers or the bed."

"It ain't the bed," said the storekeeper, and he flung himself suddenly against the panel with a force sufficient to push the obstruction back a foot at least.

Through this opening he thrust his head and saw Dick Armstrong beating a hasty retreat by way of the window.

"He's gettin' out of the winder. You stay here, Maria, and I'll try to catch him below."

Mr. Maslin, whose head was bound up with a towel, was a pretty lively man for his sixty odd years, and the way he got down the stairway and out into the yard would have put many a younger man to shame.

But the boy was as active as a young monkey, and guessed pretty closely what his persecutor's tactics would be.

He dropped his bundle into the yard, swung himself out and alighted nimbly on his feet, and when Mr. Maslin dashed out to cut him off Dick was passing through the gate into the road.

"Come back here, you young rascal, or I'll skin you alive!" he shouted angrily.

But the boy had no intention of returning now that he had crossed the Rubicon at last.

"I'll have you took up and put in the calaboose; do you hear?"

Dick heard, but the threat had no effect on him.

He bounded around the corner of the fence and ran full tilt into another boy, knocking him head over heels.

The floored youth proved to be Luke Maslin, who was returning from the village.

The storekeeper's son uttered a yell of pain and terror as he floundered about on the grass.

Dick had gone down also, his bundle flying out of his hand a yard away.

As he picked himself up, a familiar voice exclaimed:

"Hello! What's the trouble? Is that you, Dick?"

"That you, Joe?"

"Sure it's me! I was hanging about for a chance to see you again if I could. What muss have you got in now?"

"Come along with me and I'll tell you about it," Dick said as he picked up his bundle.

Mr. Maslin now hove in sight a few feet away.

"Now I've got you, you pesky little villain!" and he made a dash at the boy.

"Run, Joe!"

Fletcher took the hint and scampered after his chum, who was flying along the "heel" path of the canal as fast as he could go.

In the gathering dusk the storekeeper failed to recognize his son and heir as the latter lay sprawling in the path, and as a consequence he stumbled over Luke's extended legs and pitched forward, head first, like a stone from a catapult.

The momentum he had acquired in his eagerness to lay hold of Dick now worked greatly to his disadvantage.

Striking the path, he rolled over and over, clutching vainly at the grass to stay his progress.

As the space between the fence and the canal was narrow at this point, before he realized his predicament he was carried over the embankment and fell with a splash into the water.

"Help!" he yelled, and then his head went under.

Huskins had been attracted to the spot by the rumpus and was in time to fish his employer out of the canal; but by that time Dick Armstrong and his friend Fletcher were safe from any immediate pursuit.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### ON BOARD THE MINNEHAHA.

"So you are'n't going back any more, then?" said Joe Fletcher, after Dick had related to him the exciting experience through which he had passed since the two lads had parted, apparently for good, in Mr. Maslin's store, a little more than an hour before.

"No," replied Dick, firmly, "I'm not. I am done with Silas Maslin for good and all."

The boys were resting on a decayed tree-trunk by the side of the canal.

It was now almost dark, and both of them, having had nothing to eat since noon, were hungry.

"I guess you've done the right thing, Dick," said his friend. "You aren't likely to be any worse off than you've been at the Corner."

"I'd have pretty hard luck if I was. I'd never amount to much as long as I stayed with Mr. Maslin. He took care that I didn't get much chance to get up in the world. I wish now I'd more schooling," said the boy, regretfully.

"I'll bet you know more than Luke Maslin, and he's gone regularly to the district school. At his age—he's a year older than you—he ought to be at the Slocum High School. I don't think he cares a lot to study."

"Many boys don't seem to realize what they let get by them until it is too late," said Dick. "You and I, Joe, have got to cut our own way in life without any help from

anybody. I guess you can hold up your end. As for me, I don't intend to let any grass grow under my feet from this on. If you've rested enough, we'll move on to Norton's. Perhaps your friend Cap'n Beasley will give us something to eat. I haven't had a mouthful since dinner, and I feel as if I could clean out a pantry."

"Same here. Captain Beasley is all right, and so is his wife. They wouldn't see anyone, even a tramp, go hungry if they could help it," said Joe as the boys resumed their march. "They've a daughter, too, named Florrie. She's as pretty as a picture," and Joe grinned broadly.

Dick wasn't particularly interested in pretty girls at that moment. He was thinking whether Captain Beasley would consent to take him down to New York along with Joe on the canal-boat.

"I guess he will if I pay him something, and I'm willing to put up what's fair," mused the boy.

Norton's Lock was about six miles from Cobham's Corner.

Dick and Joe reached there at eight o'clock.

Captain Beasley's boat was moored against the eastern bank of the canal, and a few yards away was a good-sized liquor store, lit up with kerosene lamps, and, judging from the crowd within, doing a thriving trade.

There was also an open shed close by, partially filled with bundles of shingles brought there for shipment from the mill a mile or so away.

Dick followed Joe aboard the canal-boat and was introduced to Captain Beasley and his wife and daughter.

As soon as Mrs. Beasley found out that the boys were hungry, she spread a corner of the table in the little cabin for them, laid out the remains of a joint of cold mutton, boiled a pot of coffee, and upon this, flanked by a plentiful supply of bread and butter, the two lads made a very satisfactory meal.

Dick offered to pay his way to New York City, but the good-natured skipper of the Minnehaha wouldn't hear of it for a moment.

"You and Joe here are both of you welcome to go along with us, and it sha'n't cost you a cent. All I ask of you it to turn your hands to an odd job or two, maybe, till we hitch on behind the tug that takes us down the river."

Dick accepted his generous offer with thanks, as Joe had already done earlier in the day when he brought his meagre bundle aboard on the strength of the captain's former invitation.

"Neither of you lads seems to be encumbered with much dunnage," said the skipper, with a humorous glance at the two attenuated bundles ranged side by side on a shelf and which contained all they boasted of in the world.

"We both lit out in such a hurry that we didn't have time to pack our trunks," grinned Joe. "Boggs skinned me out of sixty dollars; and as for Dick, I believe there wasn't anything coming to him, though he put in many a year of good hard work down at Cobham's Corner for Silas Maslin, who runs the store and the village post-office."

"I've heard of him," nodded Captain Beasley, recharging his pipe, "and I've heard of you, too, Master Dick, afore this," and the skipper looked at the bright, stalwart, young

runaway. "Silas Maslin, I understand, is a hard man to work for, though I reckon Nathan Boggs can give him a few points in that line. Both of 'em have wives that folks say would skin a flea for its fat. From which I judge that one's appetite isn't pampered at either place."

"That's right," corroborated Dick. "We've both been through the mill and ought to know. I haven't had such a good spread as was set before us to-night right here since I can remember, and I've a pretty good recollection."

Mr. Beasley and her daughter looked at one another in astonishment.

"Well," said the captain's wife, "you sha'n't neither of you want for enough to eat as long as you are with us."

"What are you going to do when you reach the city?" asked the captain curiously. "Got any money at all?"

"I've got about sixteen dollars," replied Dick, and he told Captain Beasley by what slow and arduous means he had amassed it.

"I haven't a red cent," admitted Joe, making such a comical face that Florence Beasley burst out laughing.

"It's possible I may start a bank and take Joe in as cashier," grinned Dick.

"Not a bad idea," smiled the skipper, "so long as it isn't a faro bank or something of that sort."

"I wouldn't mind investing my capital in a sand-bank if I thought I could sell the sand and make a profit," put in Dick.

"Perhaps you would make a good speculator," said the captain, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps I would; but I've never tried my hand at it."

"A successful speculator should, first of all, have brains, and then money," said Captain Beasley, punctuating each point in the air with the stem of his briar pipe. "I judge you have the brains——"

"So have I," interrupted Joe, with some animation.

"It was a rather poor speculation you entered into with Nathan Boggs, wasn't it?" and the skipper turned to Joe.

"I don't call that a speculation; that was a dead skin," cried Fletcher stoutly.

"Well, you made an agreement with him to forfeit your wages if you quit work before the end of your term of service; you put yourself at a great disadvantage with such a man. It was to his interest to make you quit beforehand if he could."

"If I hadn't quit I guess I'd been carried away in a box, so I'd have lost anyway."

"Well, you speculated on the chance of holding out, and came in for the short end of the deal."

"That was because I didn't know what I was up against."

"Even so; that is a risk that often confronts the speculator. That's where brains count."

Captain Beasley looked at the clock, laid down his pipe and intimated it was time to turn in.

He led the boys to the forward part of the boat, pointed to a small open scuttle in the deck, and told them they'd find a mattress and a couple of blankets down there. Then wishing them good night, he left them to make the best of their narrow quarters.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN WHICH SILAS MASLIN FAILS TO RECOVER HIS RUNAWAY.

In the morning the boat was hauled across to the other side of the canal, the side on which the towpath ran; a tandem mule team in charge of a boy who sported the biggest and most disreputable straw hat Dick had ever seen, was hitched on, and the boat began to move slowly down the canal.

As they approached the bridge at Cobham's Corner, Dick got out of sight of the shore.

He knew there would be trouble if any member of the Maslin family caught a glimpse of him on board the Minnehaha.

So he squatted down inside the limited bit of hold in the eyes of the canal-boat which he and Joe had used for sleeping quarters, while his chum sat on the combings of the hatch with his legs swinging down and his gaze fixed on Cobham's Corner.

"I don't see anybody about," reported Joe, as the boat drew near the bridge which crossed the canal at this point and connected the two sections of the county road.

Captain Beasley came forward and called on Fletcher to help detach the tow-line so that the boat could pass under the bridge.

While they were doing this, Luke Maslin appeared at the door of the store.

His eyes roamed over the canal-boat from stem to stern and finally fixed themselves on Fletcher, whom he recognized, having seen and spoken to him many times when Joe called at the store to get supplies for Nathan Boggs or to see Dick.

Suddenly he ran out on the bridge and took his position just above where the boat had to pass under.

"Hello, Fletcher!" he shouted.

"Hello, yourself," growled Joe, casting a side glance at him.

"What are you doing aboard that boat?"

"Taking a sail."

"What for?"

"For my health," snorted Joe, as he pitched the end of the tow-line ashore.

"Have you left Nathan Boggs?" continued Luke, with a grin.

"Better ask him when you see him," answered the boy, squatting down with his back to young Maslin, a pretty good sign that he wanted no further communication with his questioner.

But Luke wouldn't take the hint.

"Seen anything of Dick Armstrong?" he persisted. "He's run away from here with some of my father's money. Constable Smock is hunting for him. Father is going to have him put in the village lock-up."

Joe didn't answer him.

"Maybe you've got him hid away aboard the boat," added Luke, suspiciously. "If you have, you'd better give him up, or it will be the worse for you."

As those words passed his lips the forward end of the canal-boat passed under the bridge, and Luke ran over to the other side of the structure to meet it as it floated clear.

Dick easily overheard his young enemy's remarks from the spot where he was screened from Luke's line of observation.

He forgot, however, to change his position below as the boat passed under the bridge, not thinking that Luke, by crossing the planks to the opposite rail, would be able to obtain a different focus down into his hiding-place if he was wideawake enough to keep his eyes well employed.

As this is exactly what Master Maslin did do, the result was he discovered Dick's crouching figure in the narrow hold as soon as the head of the canal-boat shot out into sight again.

"I see you down there, Dick Armstrong!" he cried, of a sudden, triumphantly.

Then he rushed off to the store to tell his father.

"I'm afraid it's all up with me," said Dick, as he scrambled out of his hiding-place.

"Well, I'd like to see them try to take you off this boat if you don't want to go," said Joe, rolling up his sleeves, while a look of determination came over his freckled features.

"It won't do to resist the constable," warned Dick. "I won't have you get into trouble over me."

"But the constable isn't around here now," put in Joe.

"They'll send him word as to my whereabouts, and he'll get a rig and cut me off further along down the canal, don't you see?"

"The only thing for me to do now is to leave the boat before I'm overhauled," Dick continued. "For if I wait until Constable Smock comes along and invites me to go ashore I'll be deprived of my savings by Mr. Maslin, even if he doesn't follow up his threat to put me in jail."

"I dare say you're right, Dick; but you can't skip yet a while, for here comes the old man and Luke across the bridge. They'll be down on us in a couple of minutes. You needn't be afraid that Captain Beasley'll make you go ashore to oblige that old rhinoceros. And if he attempts to board us, he'll be trespassing, and a douse in the canal would be the proper thing to cool him off."

Captain Beasley was leaning negligently against the forward end of his cabin, smoking his favorite briar-root pipe in the autumn sunshine, when Mr. Maslin came running down the tow-path and hailed him, his son following along behind.

"You've got a boy on board your boat I want. He's runnin' away from my place yonder, after stealin' a five-dollar bill. I want you to put him on shore," demanded Silas Maslin, keeping pace with the canal-boat.

"I've got two boys aboard," said the captain, in an indifferent tone. "Which one do you refer to?"

"The one with the new suit of clothes on," replied the storekeeper, pointing to Dick. "His name is Armstrong."

"All right," agreed Captain Beasley. "He came on board of his own accord, and if he's willing to go ashore he can go now."

"I want you to make him come on shore whether he's willin' or not," said Silas Maslin, energetically.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said the skipper, shaking his head.

"Why can't you? You're captain of that boat, and I reckon you can do 'bout as you please on board of her. If he doesn't come back with me and hand over the money he took from me, I'm going to have him arrested and put in the lock-up."

Captain Beasley walked forward to where the two boys were standing, Mr. Maslin hastening his steps to keep abreast of him.

"That's the man you've been living with, ain't it, Armstrong?" asked Captain Beasley.

"Yes, sir," admitted Dick, respectfully.

"You've heard the charge he made against you and his demand that you leave this boat and go back with him?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, beginning to fear that he was to be given up.

"Have you any of his money about you?"

"No, sir; I never took one cent of his money from the store," replied the lad, stoutly.

"Are you willing to go ashore as he wants you to do?"

"No, sir; I'd rather you'd throw me overboard," said Dick, with flashing eyes.

"You hear what he says," said the skipper, turning to the storekeeper.

"I reckon I ain't deaf," replied Mr. Maslin, in a surly tone.

"I'm afraid I can't do anything for you," said Captain Beasley, turning on his heel and walking away.

"Ain't you going to make him come on shore?" demanded the storekeeper, angrily.

"No, sir; I've nothing whatever to do with your quarrel with the boy."

"The boy is a thief, and you're helpin' him to get away," cried Mr. Maslin. "Don't you know that's ag'in the law and that I can make you sweat for it?"

"He has denied the charge, and as there is no proof against him his word is as good as yours," replied the skipper, resuming his former station against the cabin wall.

"I'll have you up before the justice for this," shouted Mr. Maslin, coming to a stop and shaking his fist at the captain of the Minnehaha. "And what's more, I'll have that boy took up by the constable afore you get many miles further down the canal."

After hurling his threats after the receding boat he and Luke turned about and hurried back the way they came.

"I guess the storekeeper means to send the constable after you with a warrant for your arrest, Armstrong," said the captain when the two boys ranged up alongside of him after Mr. Maslin took his departure, "in which case you'll have to go along with the officer. Now, if you will take my advice, young man, you'll get ashore at Caspar's, a mile below here, and make your way by land to Albany, where we'll lay up a week or so, as I've got to load up there for New York after discharging what I've brought on from

Buffalo and Syracuse. You can leave your bundle aboard — your friend will look out for it."

As the captain's advice was good, Dick determined to act on it.

After receiving explicit directions where to rejoin the boat at Albany, Dick bade all hands good-bye for the time being and left the boat at Caspar's.

## CHAPTER VI.

HOW DICK RUNS ACROSS A DESERTED FARMHOUSE, AND  
WHAT HE FINDS THERE.

Caspar's was simply a small roadhouse, situated near a bridge.

Dick Armstrong crossed the bridge and struck out across the country, following the country road.

He had general directions how to proceed, but expected to depend on people he might meet along the road to keep him from going astray.

The morning was young when he set out, and as he was in good spirits and accustomed to plenty of exercise, he walked along at a swinging gait.

About eleven o'clock he was overtaken by a farm wagon, the owner of which not only gave him a lift for several miles on his way, but his dinner also at a neat farmhouse a short distance back from the turnpike.

Although the farmer refused payment, Dick insisted on helping him for an hour about the barn, and when he finally left to continue his journey the farmer's wife handed him a substantial package of eatables which included a pint bottle of milk.

About dark Dick reached a junction of two roads.

It was a lonesome neighborhood, and as nobody was in sight to direct him which was the better one to take, he turned into the road leading off to the right.

He was glancing around for a large stone or a tree-stump for a seat on which to rest while he ate his supper, when he spied a light dimly shining through a window a little distance back from the road.

"I've walked enough for to-day," he mused. "I'll see if I can't get a bed or a chance to sleep on the hay in the barn, perhaps, up yonder."

The gate opening on the lane leading to the house was wide open and hanging by one hinge only.

As Dick approached the dwelling he was impressed by the air of neglect and desolation which hung about the place.

But for the solitary gleam of light which penetrated the gloom he would have believed the premises to be deserted.

The boy knocked several times on the weather-seamed door, but no one answered his summons.

Finally he decided to turn the handle of the door.

It yielded to his touch, and he entered a large room that was quite bare and cheerless from floor to ceiling.

The dim light from a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle standing on a dusty mantel shelf showed him the motionless figure of a man crouching over an old stove, in which was a fire, at one side of the room.

"Hello!" Dick exclaimed, by way of introduction.

Slowly the figure turned its head and presented a face almost ghostly from its whiteness.

"What's the trouble with you?" asked Dick, for he easily made out that something ailed the man.

"I'm sick," was the half moaned reply.

"Sick," repeated the boy, looking at him attentively. "Gee! You do look bad, for a fact. What can I do for you?"

"If you would do me a favor, go out to the barn back of the building. You'll find my team there. There's a couple of blankets in the wagon and a number of gunny-sacks. Bring them in here so I can make a bed and lie down," said the man, slowly and with much difficulty.

Dick put his bundle of food on the floor and hastened to do as the stranger had requested.

He found the team—a pair of stout horses hitched to a large, covered wagon—just as it had been led into the deserted and mildewed barn and left standing there.

With the aid of a match or two, a supply of which Dick from habit always carried about with him, he climbed into the wagon and found the things the man wanted.

The only other articles the boy noticed in the vehicle were a couple of empty bushel baskets, a sack half filled with oats, a horse bucket, a long whip and a small wicker hamper.

Dick carried the bags and blankets into the house and spread them out so as to form a bed.

"There," he said, in his cheery tones, "you can lie down now. If there's anything else I can do for you, let me know."

"You're very kind, my lad," gratefully replied the man, who seemed to be about fifty years of age. "You might get a few sticks for the fire; the night is cold, and I'll be glad if you could find me a drink of water anywhere near by—you'll find a cup in the hamper in the wagon. And then, if you'd not feel it was too much trouble to give those animals a mess of oats which you will find in a bag in the wagon, you will do all that I would ask of you."

"All right," said Dick, and he cheerfully proceeded to do what the sick man asked of him.

He found a tin cup in the hamper, which also contained a neat sandwich, half of an apple pie, a piece of gingerbread and two pieces of candle wrapped in a bit of newspaper.

Dick fortunately turning his steps in the right direction, found a spring at the back of the barn, and fetched a cupful of the cold water to the stricken stranger, which he drank with evident relish.

The boy then replenished the fire in the stove and returned to the barn.

Lighting one of the bits of candle, he took the bucket and watered the horses.

Then he released them from their traces, led them into two of the dusty stalls, and dumping a liberal quantity of oats into the bins, left them to themselves.

"Have a drink of milk?" said Dick to the sick man as he untied his bundle preparatory to eating his supper.

The stranger thankfully accepted his offer, then turned on his side and apparently went to sleep.

Dick had brought in a horse blanket which he had found folded on the wagon seat, and after he had eaten all he wanted and put more wood in the grate, curled himself up near the stove and was presently oblivious to his surroundings.

He was up before sunrise, as he was accustomed to being roused out of bed at five o'clock at that season of the year by Mr. Maslin.

The morning was chilly, so he started a fire in the stove for the benefit of the stranger, who seemed to be sleeping easily.

After that Dick went to the barn and fed the horses.

Then, as the sun was beginning to peep above the horizon, he thought he would take a look around the place, which seemed to be going to rack and ruin.

His investigations did not extend very far, for just beyond the line of broken fence which marked the boundary of what had probably been the truck patch Dick found an apple orchard.

A large number of the trees were not only loaded with this fruit, but the boy's experienced eye told him that many of the trees were of a superior variety.

The apples on these trees were large, solid, and rosy.

Dick gathered an armful and carried them to the house. The strange man was awake, but very weak and not in condition to get up.

"You'd better drink the rest of this milk," said Dick, offering the tin cup.

"Thank you, lad. What is your name?" he asked after drinking it.

"Dick Armstrong."

"Mine is Hiram Bond. You've been very kind to me. I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't turned up. Where do you live?"

"I don't live anywhere just at present," answered the boy, frankly.

"How is that?" asked Bond, with some surprise.

Dick gave him a brief outline of his life, and more particularly of his recent experiences.

"You've had a hard time of it," said the man, feebly, "and I don't wonder you cut loose from that storekeeper. I live in Albany, and make a living—not a very good one—with my team, carrying loads of stuff around the country. I just moved a family from the city suburbs to Wayback, some fifteen miles from here, and was on my return when I was took bad. I'm subject to spells of heart trouble, and I'm afraid I sha'n't last long. I don't feel at all good this morning. Perhaps I'll feel better by and by. If you don't mind staying with me till the afternoon, I may feel able to sit up in the wagon, and you can drive me back to the city. It'll save you a walk of thirty odd miles."

Dick immediately agreed to this proposition, and then his eyes resting on the pile of rosy apples he had brought in, an idea struck him.

"There's an orchard back of the barn that's full of this kind of apples," he said, showing a couple to Bond. "If you don't mind, I could load the wagon with them, and we could sell them at a good profit in Albany. They're

only going to waste here, and as your wagon is empty, it's a chance for both of us to make a stake."

"Do so, my lad, if you think there's anything in it for you. I won't touch a cent of what you may get. I'll give you the use of the team for what you've done for me already."

Dick was delighted and thanked him heartily.

"Can you eat anything at all this morning?" he asked Bond.

The man shook his head, said he felt tired, turned over, and tried to go to sleep again.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DICK'S FIRST SPECULATION.

Dick spent the entire morning gathering apples, making selection of the best that he shook down or knocked from the limbs.

"It's like picking up money," he mused as he gathered them into one of the bushel baskets and then carried them to the wagon, which he had drawn out into the yard, and dumped them inside.

"I wonder how many bushels I can get away with," he figured, after a careful estimate of the load he had already secured. "I believe this wagon will hold close on to forty bushels, but it'll be an all-day job to gather that many. I'm afraid I'll have to be satisfied with twenty, if we're going to leave here early this afternoon. That ought to give me fifty dollars out of the spec. Gee! That's better than working like a slave for Silas Maslin at nothing a week and skimpy board."

Dick looked in on Hiram Bond every little while, but the man appeared to be sleeping right along.

Noon came, and the boy began to feel decidedly hungry.

"I guess I might as well clean up Mr. Bond's basket," he argued. "It isn't likely he'll care for any solid food to-day. I'll get him some milk at the first house I see along the road."

So Dick ate the sandwich, the piece of gingerbread, and the remains of the apple pie, topping off with a big drink of spring water.

After that he felt very much better and resumed his work with fresh energy.

At two o'clock he found Hiram Bond awake, but as weak as a cat, to use his own expression.

Clearly the man was in no condition to leave the place that day.

"I fear this will finish me," said Bond, in a weak voice.

"I'll take one of the horses and start on down the road for help," said Dick, regarding the man with an anxious eye. "You'll die at this rate, for you haven't had any nourishment but that small cup of milk all day."

"Perhaps you had better do so," acquiesced Bond, feebly. "I think there's a farmhouse about five or six miles below here."

"Then I'm off," said Dick. "I'll get them to send a vehicle to remove you from this place—you can't stay here another night."

Dick mounted one of the animals and started off down

the road, the horse being accustomed to nothing faster than a gentle trot.

It was something over an hour before the boy reached a house.

Here he told his story, which aroused the practical sympathy of the farmer, who hitched up a light wagon, collected such things, including a bag of feed for the horses, as the occasion seemed to demand, and in company with Dick started for the deserted homestead.

The farmer, after talking to Hiram Bond, decided to convey him to his house.

Wrapping him up in the blankets, he and Dick started him to the wagon and made him as comfortable as possible for the ride.

"I'll bring the team on later," said the boy.

Farmer Haywood nodded and then drove off, Dick returning to the work of gathering more apples.

By dark he had turned into the wagon thirty bushels by actual count.

"I can carry another ten bushels just as well as not," he said to himself. "I will stay here all night and finish the job in the morning. I'll be twenty-five dollars more to the good by hanging on. I guess I can stand a diet of apples and water for a few hours, at that rate. It won't be the first time I've gone to sleep or to work half-fed. If a fellow expects to get along in the world he's got to take things as they come, and say nothing."

Next morning about eleven o'clock Dick walked his team, with his load of some forty bushels of harvest apples, into Farmer Haywood's yard.

"How is Mr. Bond?" was his first question of Mrs. Haywood, who greeted him at the door.

"Very poorly, indeed. We had to send for a doctor. I'm afraid he isn't going to recover."

Dick was very sorry to learn this news.

After he had hauled the wagon into a corner of the yard, and put the horses into the barn, the lad had something to eat and was then taken up to see Hiram Bond, who had been accommodated with a spare room and was the object of considerate attention.

"I'm glad to see you again, my lad," said Mr. Bond, in a very weak voice, regarding Dick with an earnest expression. "I should like you to stay with me while I last; I will make it all right with you."

"I shall be glad to stay with you till I can get you back to your home in Albany," replied Dick, cheerfully. "I'm sure you'll be all right in a day or two."

Hiram Bond shook his head.

"I shall never be all right again. This isn't the first attack of heart failure I've had, but I feel it will be the last. I've lost all my strength. My insides seem to have collapsed entirely. It is a strange, indescribable sensation that warns me to prepare for my last journey. Boy, it is useless to disguise the truth—I am going to die. The doctor didn't say so, but I read the fact in his face. He saw that he could do nothing for me. Well, it matters little whether I die now or a little later on. I have no kith or kin to whom my death would be a blow. I am entirely

alone in the world. At one time it was different, and I was well off; but now my team and the few dollars in my pocket-book represent all my earthly possessions. My boy, I have been thinking of you while I have been stretched on my back. You are beginning life quite as friendless, I might say, as I am leaving it. But you appear to have energy and the capacity for hard work. I have little doubt but you will succeed. You have been kind to me and I wish I was in a position to return the favor substantially. What little I can do for you to help you along I will do. You shall have my team to use or dispose of as you may think best. The money I possess will scarcely more than recompense Farmer Haywood for his trouble and pay the expenses of my funeral. I should like to be buried in some quiet spot—the nearest village burying-ground. If you will see that this is done, it is all I ask of you."

Dick was exceedingly shocked as he listened to the words of the dying man—for that Hiram Bond really was passing away, slowly but surely, there didn't seem to be any doubt.

When he finished, he asked the boy to fetch Farmer Haywood.

He requested the farmer to execute a bill of sale, which he signed with difficulty, transferring his wagon and team of horses to Dick.

After that was done he seemed to feel better.

There was little change in his condition until after midnight, when he gradually grew weaker and weaker, and finally died just before daylight.

Although Dick had met him so strangely only a couple of days before, his death affected the boy greatly for the time being.

He felt as though he had lost a good friend that he had known for many years.

A simple funeral from Farmer Haywood's to the nearby churchyard wound up the life history of Hiram Bond, and the day following Dick Armstrong drove his suddenly acquired property into the streets of Albany.

He had an idea that by visiting the various hotels in the city he might dispose of his apples to good advantage and with more profit than if he did business with a commission merchant.

His plan was successful, largely because the stewards of the places he visited happened to be running out of the fruit and because his apples were uncommonly fine and quite scarce in the market.

As a consequence he obtained an average of about \$2.60 a bushel for them, and when he put his team up at the place where Hiram Bond had been accustomed to keep it he was in possession of bills and silver to the amount of \$120, which included the money he had brought away from his former home at Cobham's Corner.

## CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH DICK TAKES A PARTNER, AND THE FIRM WINDS UP THE APPLE SPECULATION.

Late that afternoon Dick Armstrong, feeling all the importance of a small capitalist, started out to locate the canal-boat Minnehaha.

He found the rendezvous of those craft without much difficulty, but to pick out the particular boat of which he was in search was not quite such a simple matter.

At length he found her, hauled up against the wharf, discharging the last of her cargo.

Joe Fletcher was working like a good fellow, helping Captain Beasley's regular deckhand, when he caught sight of his chum.

"Dick, old man, I'm just tickled to death to see you again," he exclaimed, grabbing Dick's hand and shaking it as though he would pull it off. "We expected to see you yesterday, according to my calculations. How have you fared since you went ashore at Caspar's?"

"First class. I've news that'll surprise you," replied Dick, with sparkling eyes.

"You don't say."

"By the way, how about Constable Smock? Did he show up?"

"Did he? I guess yes. He came up with us about eight miles below Caspar's. Wouldn't take our word that you had gone ashore, but insisted on searching the boat. Of course, Captain Beasley let him have full swing. After he had gone into every nook and corner that might have concealed you, he gave the job up and left, the maddest man I've seen for many a day. I was afraid he might get wind of you at Caspar's and run you down; but it appears he didn't. I'll bet Silas Maslin and Luke ain't feeling any too good over the constable's failure to fetch you back," and Joe snapped his rough, brown fingers and laughed gleefully.

"You don't think that Silas Maslin would come on to Albany on the chance of picking me up, do you?" asked Dick, with a shade of apprehension in his voice.

"You ought to be better able to judge of that than me, Dick. You know what he is and what his feelings probably are on the subject. If I was you, I'd keep my eye skinned and not let him catch me, if he should come."

In a few minutes they knocked off work for the day, and while Joe was washing up, Captain Beasley came on board and greeted Dick in his usual breezy manner.

He accepted the skipper's invitation to supper, and when he made his appearance in the cabin was warmly welcomed by Mrs. Beasley and Florrie.

Joe and the others were curious to learn the particulars of his journey from Caspar's, though they had no idea that he had met with any particular adventure by the way.

What he had to tell was therefore received with much surprise.

"Gee!" exclaimed Joe, when Dick had finished his recital. "If that doesn't read like a story-book! So the man actually gave you the wagon and the pair of horses?"

"That's what he did. The outfit is housed at McGee's stables at this moment."

"What are you going to do with them? Sell them, I s'pose, 'cause you can't take them with you on this boat."

"I haven't decided what I'll do yet," said the boy, with a thoughtful expression.

"And what about the load of apples?" asked Joe, interestedly.

"I brought on forty bushels and sold them to half a dozen of the hotels just as soon as I struck town."

"Good for you! How much did you realize?"

"One hundred and four dollars."

"No!" exclaimed Joe, in surprise.

"That's right," nodded Dick, while his face lighted up with satisfaction. "That wasn't a bad speculation, was it, Captain Beasley?"

"I should say it was a very good one," replied the skipper of the Minnehaha.

"And I've got another one in my eye now that ought to pan out even better."

"What is it?" asked Joe, eagerly.

"There's a fine grove of walnuts and hickory nuts on that deserted farm, and they'll be ready for picking just as soon as the frost sets in good and hard. They'll fetch over two dollars a bushel in this town at wholesale. If there's one bushel, I'll bet there's a hundred and fifty to be got."

"Great Scott!" almost shouted Fletcher in his excitement. "Let me in on this, will you, Dick? I'll help you pick them at twenty-five cents a bushel, just for the fun of the thing."

"I was about to propose something of that kind, as I wouldn't care to go out there all alone. You don't know what a spooky place it is. I'll take you in as a partner, Joe, and give you one-third of the profits. I'd make it even up, only the team costs something, and it's only fair I should have a percentage for its use."

"A third is too much," objected Joe. "It's your discovery and your scheme. I'll be perfectly satisfied with one quarter."

"No, Joe; it must be one third, or I'll call the whole thing off and sell the team," said Dick, resolutely.

"All right, Dick; but I call it uncommonly liberal."

"Pooh! We're chums, aren't we?"

"Sure we are."

"Then stop your kicking."

Captain Beasley, who had been an amused listener to the foregoing debate, now ventured a word.

"You forget, Master Armstrong, that it'll be some two or three weeks yet before you can gather those nuts. What are you going to do in the meantime, for of course, if you've determined on this plan, you're not going down to New York on this boat."

"Oh, I've got an idea to cover that time," said the boy, with sparkling eyes.

"Another speculation, eh?" smiled the captain.

"Yes, I dare say it is. Any risk that a person takes for the sake of expected profit is a speculation, I suppose."

"That's about the size of it," nodded the skipper.

"But, first of all, I'd like to take a run out to that farm to-morrow and gather the rest of those harvest apples. There's fully another load to be got, and if I don't take them they'll rot on the ground."

"I'm in this, too, am I, Dick?" asked Joe, anxiously.

"Why not, if you're willing?"

"You can bet your suspenders I'm willing to go, all right."

"Then that's settled. Do you mind if I bunk aboard here to-night, Captain Beasley?" asked Dick.

"You're welcome to sleep, and eat for that matter, aboard the Minnehaha as long as she's here, young man. I admire enterprise in a fellow of your years, and you seem to be loaded to the hatches with it. If you aren't a millionaire one of these days, it'll be because the trusts we read about and the plutocrats have gobbled up all the wealth that's lying around loose."

Soon after that, the two boys retired to the forward compartment of the hold and turned in, but they had so much to talk over and plan for the future that it was nearly midnight before they fell asleep.

They were on deck at sunrise.

Dick found lots to interest him before breakfast, in the panorama of the city's water front, at least that section of it where the fleet of canal-boats was moored close in-shore.

After breakfast the lads bade Captain Beasley and his family good-bye, promising to look them up at the Water Street moorage when they reached New York.

Dick then led the way to McGee's stables, where he and Joe hitched up the wagon and started out.

Having provided themselves with provisions and feed for the animals, they took the road back to the deserted farm, at which they arrived, without any adventure, late in the afternoon.

They passed the whole of the next day in getting together a load.

Thirty-five bushels about cleaned up all the good apples left.

They passed a second night at the old rookery, as Joe called it, and on the following morning started early for Albany.

Dick sold the entire load to a commission house for \$95, but he and Joe had to procure the necessary number of barrels to hold the fruit in shape for shipment to New York.

After paying to Joe his share of the profits, Dick found, expenses deducted, that his cash capital had increased to \$175.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A TRANSACTION IN NUTS.

"Gee! I never was so rich in my life!" exclaimed Joe Fletcher as he counted over the \$30 he had received from Dick and contemplated the bills with a childish sort of delight.

"If Nathan Boggs had paid you what he owes you for you five months' service on his farm, you'd have ninety dollars easy enough now," remarked his young partner and chum, tucking away his own "boodle" in a safe place.

"Yep, I 'spect so," grinned Joe, who was not lamenting the loss of that \$60 just at present.

"Boggs ought to be prosecuted and made to shell out."

"And the screws ought to be put to Silas Maslin, too," said Joe. "He treated you worse, on the whole, than Boggs had the chance to do to me."

"I don't say he didn't; but I'm satisfied if I never run across him again. I can make my own way in the world, and I'm going to do it."

"I'll bet you will. You're smart enough, all right," answered Joe, admiringly.

The boys had arranged with the stable keeper so they could sleep in the building in the little room in the hay-loft formerly occupied by Hiram Bond.

On their return from the restaurant where they had had supper they found a man waiting to see Dick.

"My name is Gibson," said the stranger, introducing himself. "I'm from Wayback, where I keep a general store. I've got a load of stuff I want hauled out to my place. Hiram Bond used to do my carting, but as he is dead and I'm told you have his outfit, I thought probably we could strike a bargain between us. What'll you charge me?"

"How far is Wayback from here?" asked Dick, who was ready to accept the job if there was anything in it.

"Nigh on to forty-five miles."

The boy pondered a moment and then named a figure.

Gibson started to dicker for a lower sum, but Dick cut him short.

"I wouldn't do it for a cent lower, Mr. Gibson. I don't know what Hiram Bond was accustomed to charge you, but the price I've set is a reasonable one. I had something else in view, but I'll haul your goods out to Wayback on the terms I've mentioned. Is it a bargain or not?"

Dick's manner was thoroughly business-like, and he appeared to be indifferent whether he got the job or not.

"But you're only a boy," persisted the Wayback store-keeper. "You ought to do it cheaper than a man."

"Think so?" retorted the lad, looking him in the eye. "Well, that isn't the way I do business. I expect to deliver your stuff in as good shape as Hiram Bond would have done, so the fact that I am a boy can't make any difference."

Mr. Gibson finally agreed to the charge and told Dick to be on hand at a certain wholesale store in the morning, where he would meet him.

"All right. Good night, sir."

Mr. Gibson had a free ride along with his goods, and the team reached Wayback about nine o'clock next evening.

The boys carried the merchandise into the store, and as the storekeeper had a barn large enough to accommodate the horses and wagon, Dick arranged with him to put up his team there, they to sleep in the wagon themselves.

While Dick and Joe were hitching up next morning a farmer came up in company with Gibson and inquired what it would cost him to get a load of potatoes to Albany.

"How much do you expect to get for them?" asked Dick.

The farmer, with some shrewdness, named a lower price than he actually expected to receive, thinking thereby to cheapen the cartage.

"All right," said Dick, promptly. "I'll buy the lot from

you for so much"—naming a lower figure—"and I'll pay you cash down for them."

The farmer saw he had made a mistake and started to hedge, but Dick said those were the only terms on which he would take the potatoes.

"But they'll fetch more'n that in town," objected the farmer.

"I expect to make a profit, or I shouldn't have made you the offer," said Dick.

"But I made a mistake in putting the price too low. I can get more'n that at a commission store in the city," persisted the agriculturalist.

"I offer you spot cash," and Dick yanked out his roll of bills, which he displayed before the owner of the potatoes. "Take me up, and you're relieved of all further bother."

The farmer needed the money, and the sight of the cash smothered his scruples about selling at a reduced price, so the deal was closed on the spot.

Dick drove around to his farm and examined his stock of potatoes.

He found them to be in all respects as they had been represented, so he paid over the money and loaded them into the wagon.

"That was a good trade," said Joe as they drove down the road.

"Yes; I expect to make at least twenty-five dollars out of them," replied his chum.

As a matter of fact he cleared \$32, for the price had gone up a little within the two days he had been away from the city.

Next day Dick picked up another cartage job as far as Newtown Junction on the railroad.

Just before reaching his destination he noticed the section men replacing a lot of old sleepers with new ones.

The old ones were tossed aside for the present, and he saw a group of small boys carrying several of them off.

This put an idea into his head.

On his return he singled out the section boss and asked him if he could have a few.

"Sure; take as many as you want," replied the man, good-naturedly.

As Dick intended to take up the offer literally, he handed the boss a dollar-bill.

The man grinned in a friendly way and turned away.

Then the two boys gradually filled up the wagon with the old ties as they proceeded on their way.

Dick stopped at a large woodyard in Albany and sold the wood at a very handsome profit, a third of which went to Joe.

"The firm of Armstrong & Fletcher seems to be doing pretty well, all things considered," remarked Joe as he added a few additional bills to his small wad.

"That's what we're in business for," was Dick's reply.

Two weeks slipped by, and Dick managed to keep his team employed at various odd jobs of hauling between the business section and the suburbs of Albany.

His cash capital, after deducting all expenses to date, had increased to \$200.

He decided it was now time to look up his contemplated venture in nuts.

Accordingly he purchased the necessary supplies for a possible week's stay at the deserted farm, and they made an early start for the scene of operations.

The nights were now cold and frosty, and the boys found it necessary for comfort to keep up a good fire in the old, rusty stove, the only article left behind by the former occupants when they moved away.

Just why this farm had been abandoned was not clearly understood, even by Farmer Haywood, the nearest neighbor.

It had been vacant for more than a year, and a mildewed sign planted near the fence gave the passerby notice that the place was for sale and that information could be obtained from somebody whose name and address were no longer decipherable.

Early on the morning succeeding their arrival Dick and Joe walked out to the grove of nut trees and found the ground literally covered with nuts.

It was fully a mile back of the house.

They brought the wagon to the edge of the wood and spent the whole day loading up.

By keeping a careful count they found they had accumulated forty bushels.

"This is first-class," said Dick when they got back to the shelter of the house. "I was afraid we might have to hang around here several days before we could get busy. Now I guess we'll be able to clean up this place in a week, including, of course, the time spent in carting the nuts to the city."

Dick was not far out of the way in his calculation as to the time it would take them to gather the plentiful supply of nuts to be found in the grove.

"This will be our last load," he said as they were driving back to the abandoned farm eight days later, after having delivered and sold 150 bushels of nuts in Albany for \$2.10 a bushel in bulk.

"Yes; there aren't many more left," said Joe, regretfully, for having pocketed so far a matter of \$100 as his share of the speculation, he could not help wishing such a good thing would keep up indefinitely. "What are we going to do next?" he added.

"The firm of Armstrong & Fletcher will probably dissolve, for the time being, at any rate, as I expect to sell the team and start for New York."

"I'm sorry for that," replied Joe, with a long face.

"I don't know that you need be. There's more money to be made in New York," said Dick, encouragingly.

"But you've got to know how to make it," retorted Joe, who had lived many years in the great metropolis himself and had found money-getting a serious proposition there.

"You've got to know how to make it anywhere, for that matter," said Dick. "I've heard several people say that if you can't make money in New York you can't make it anywhere."

"The papers say there are a hundred thousand men out of work there all the time."

"That may be; but the same men are not out of work all the time."

"Albany is the biggest town you've ever seen in all your life. Wait till you strike New York, and you'll be lost."

"I think not, Joe, with you at my elbow to show me the ropes. I've cut my eye-teeth in a pretty hard school, and even if I'm only sixteen, I feel sure I can hold my own against the world. I've made nearly four hundred dollars since I cut loose from Mr. Maslin, four weeks ago, and I think that's a pretty fair showing for a beginner."

It was now quite dark, and a turn in the road brought them in sight of the house.

"Hello!" exclaimed Joe, clutching Dick suddenly by the arm. "Someone is before us this time."

And he pointed to a light which shone from an end window of the kitchen.

## CHAPTER X.

### IN WHICH DICK FINDS LUKE MASLIN IN BAD COMPANY AND OVERHEARS A SHADY SCHEME.

"Tramps!" ejaculated Dick, in some dismay. Then he added, in a perplexed tone: "What are we going to do? They've got possession of the only decent room in the house."

"Maybe there's only one of them," suggested Joe, hopefully.

"Even so; he has as much right there as we have, if it came to an argument."

Joe scratched his head and admitted the fact.

"We've simply been trespassers on the property ourselves from the start," said Dick.

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" asked Fletcher as Dick pulled up under the trees by the side of the road a short distance from the gate.

"Wait here till I come back," and the young driver handed the reins to his chum and descended from his perch.

Vaulting the rail fence, he approached the old building by a flank movement across the weed-encumbered yard.

He picked up a large, flat stone and placed it beneath the window.

Stepping on it, he peered through the dirt-begrimed window into the room.

A fire was burning in the grate, and gathered about the stove were three figures, two of whom were boys.

They were not tramps.

The man, who had at that moment a bottle glued to his lips, was bearded and wore a coarse fur cap.

As the man dropped the flask into a pocket of his jacket he made some remark and lifted the stove-lid with a stout twig.

The end boy reached for some broken branches, rose and began to stuff these into the grate.

The glare of the blaze shone full in his face, and Dick gave a gasp of astonishment.

He recognized the freckled features of Luke Maslin.

"G—nz! What's he doing here?" muttered the boy outside.

Naturally his curiosity was greatly excited.

It was a strange place and strange company for the son of Silas Maslin to be found mixed up with.

What did it all mean?

"I never knew Luke to be away from home before, and here he is thirty miles from Cobham's Corner," murmured Dick. "There's something queer about it."

The cold night wind whisking about the building soon made the young watcher's position one of discomfort.

"They act as if they intended to stay a while," he said to himself. "I'd like to discover what their intentions are."

Dick thought a moment; then he went round to a door which he knew opened on an entry that communicated with the kitchen.

He removed his shoes and cautiously entered the house.

The door at the end of the entry leading into the kitchen was partly open, and through this door the boy plainly heard the sound of conversation.

He tiptoed his way to the door, and through the crack between the upper and lower hinges he got a good view of the intruders.

As the trio spoke in their ordinary tones, Dick heard every word they said.

"I didn't agree to go into any such thing as this when I left home," said Luke, in a tone of plain remonstrance.

"It ain't what you agreed to do; it's what you got to do, now you're with us," spoke up the whiskered man, with a fierce glance at the storekeeper's son, evidently bent on intimidating him.

"What you kickin' about, Luke," interjected the other youth, whom Dick thought he identified as a certain bad boy of Walkhill village named Tim Bunker. "A feller that'll steal five dollars off his old man ain't got no reason to grumble when he's showed how he kin make twenty times that much without any risk to mention."

The speaker leaned forward and squirted a stream of tobacco juice into the fire, while the bearded man nodded his approval.

"I didn't steal five dollars," said Luke, doggedly. "I borrowed it from the till because I needed it, and I was going to put it back when I got it again."

"Ho, ho! That ain't the way you give it to me first. You told me how slick you got away with it, 'cause you wanted it to buy a gun you saw advertised in a Syracuse paper, and your old man wouldn't give you the price. Then you said the old man found out he was a fiver to the bad and charged Dick Armstrong with stealing it. He skipped out 'cause he couldn't prove he didn't take it and didn't wanter go to jail for what he didn't do. And you ain't heard nothin' from him since, have you?"

"No, we haven't," growled Luke.

"After doin' all that damage, now you want to preach us a sermon ag'inst helpin' ourselves to a nice little bunch of dough that's just waitin' to be put in circulation after lyin' in old Miser Fairclough's strong-box these forty years. He's a peach, ain't he, Mudgett?" appealing to the man

beside him, who at that moment was taking another drink from his flask.

"A born chump," admitted Mudgett, wiping his lips with the cuff of his jacket. "I'm disappointed in him, Tim."

"So'm I. Thought he had more backbone. And it's such an easy snap, too. Just like pickin' up money, ain't it?" grinned the Bunker boy.

"That's what it is," replied Mudgett, complacently. "It was a clever idea of mine to send that old miser a letter telling him his brother, who lives in Walkhill, was dead and had left him the bulk of his money."

"That's right," grinned Bunker. "Fairclough has been waitin' for his brother to die for twenty years or more. It's the only thing that could have got him away from his house."

"And now all we've got to do is to walk in and help ourselves," said Mudgett.

"That's all," winked Tim Bunker. "It's almost a shame it's so easy."

The young rascal chuckled and thumped Luke on the back.

"Brace up," he cried to Mr. Maslin's graceless son. "You're one of us now in this scheme, and Mudgett won't hear of you backin' out at the last minit."

"But I don't want nothing to do with it," protested Luke.

"That doesn't make no matter of difference whether you want to or not," said Mudgett, in a threatening voice. "You're in this thing right up to your neck, for you delivered that letter to Fairclough himself, and he won't forget that when he comes back and finds out what happened while he was away. You can't go back to Cobham's without the certainty of being arrested on sight."

The bearded man stated the case with such brutal frankness that Luke turned white and began to whimper.

"Shut up, will you!" thundered Mudgett, reaching over and grabbing Luke by the collar. "Stop your snivelling, or I'll break every bone in your body."

The storekeeper's son was frightened into silence.

"When do we start, Mudgett?" asked Bunker, fishing a cigarette from his pocket and lighting it.

"We'll start now, I guess. It must be close on to nine o'clock. There isn't much danger of anyone seeing us on the road after that hour."

Dick, who had been an amazed listener of the foregoing conversation, concluded it was time to withdraw.

When he got outside he found the light had been extinguished in the kitchen, and he took that as a sign that the trio were on the move.

Fearing his presence might be detected in the yard if he attempted to recross it to the fence, he crept under a corner of the porch and waited.

Mudgett and the two boys appeared almost immediately and walked out to the road.

Dick was in a sweat lest they might discover the team where it had been waiting a good half-hour for him to return.

But they turned up the road without looking in the other direction, and when Dick reached the gate he could just make out their figures disappearing in the distance.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DICK AND JOE ON THE TRAIL OF MUDGETT, TIM BUNKER AND THEIR DUPE.

"You've been a mighty long time investigating matters," grumbled Joe Fletcher, poking his head over the seat when he heard his chum's voice, for he had retired to the interior of the wagon to keep warm.

"Perhaps I have," replied Dick, as he climbed up to his perch and started the team. "But I guess I'll surprise you when I tell you what I've seen and heard."

"Well, I'm ready to hear the story," said Joe, with mingled impatience and curiosity.

"Of course you've heard of William Fairclough, who keeps a stock farm at Walkhill," began Dick.

"Sure I have."

"And you've also heard he has a brother named Adam, who lives on the outskirts of Jayville, which is six miles from here."

"Yes the folks in Walkhill call him Miser Fairclough."

"You've got it right. He occupies an old mansion, built some time before the Revolutionary War. He bought the place for a song, I heard, about forty years ago. Well, there's a scheme on foot to rob old Fairclough to-night, and it's up to us to head it off."

"Rob the miser!" exclaimed Joe, in astonishment.

"Exactly. He has been decoyed away to Walkhill by a bogus letter, which informed him that his brother William is dead."

"Gee! You don't mean it!"

"I overheard a large part of the scheme by listening just outside of the kitchen door that opens on the entry."

"Then it was a gang of robbers you found at the house?" said Joe, in open-mouthed wonder.

"I found a man and two boys," answered Dick. "But before I say anything more we'll unharness the team and make them comfortable for the night."

The two boys lost no time getting the horses into the barn and putting before them a plentiful supply of oats.

"Did you ever run across a fellow named Tim Bunker in Walkkill?" asked Dick, taking up the thread of his story again, as he dived into their provision hamper and fished up a couple of egg sandwiches, one of which he handed to his chum, with the remark that time was precious and that was all he might expect to eat for some hours.

"I've heard of Tim Bunker," said Joe, with a nod, as they walked toward the road. "He's a hard nut. What about him?"

"He's mixed up in this affair."

"Is that so? Can't say I'm much surprised."

"And who do you imagine the other boy to be?"

"I couldn't guess."

"No, I don't think you could. Don't fall down, now, when I tell you. It is Luke Maslin."

"Luke Maslin!" exclaimed Joe, stopping stock still in the middle of the road.

"Yes, Luke Maslin," repeated Dick, enjoying his friend's astonishment. "He's in pretty bad company."

"Why, what's he doing 'way down here, thirty miles from the Corner?"

"That's what surprised me at first, but from what Tim Bunker said in the kitchen while I was taking it all in from behind the door, I've got a pretty clear idea of the way Luke has got himself into this pickle. It seems he did take that five dollars out of his father's money-drawer that I was accused of stealing."

"I guessed he was the thief," nodded Joe, conclusively.

"Then he foolishly boasted of it to Tim Bunker, thinking he had done a clever thing. Now it looks as if Tim took advantage of this knowledge to force Luke to join him and the man Mudgett in the enterprise they have in hand without letting him know exactly what they intended to do."

"What makes you think he didn't know?"

"Because it looked to me as if they'd just been explaining the real situation to him before I came on the scene, for he was kicking against it like a mule."

"He was, eh?"

"Yes. Mudgett and Tim Bunker were sharp enough to put Luke in a tight box before they took him into their confidence."

"How?"

"They had him deliver the decoy note to Adam Fairclough. It was a mean trick, for it implicates Luke in the job, as they intended it should. That puts him completely in their power, don't you see?"

"I wouldn't be in his shoes for a mint," said Joe as they turned into the road leading to Jayville. "But it serves him right for stealing that money from his father, and then when it come out letting you shoulder all the blame. He wouldn't have opened his mouth to clear you if you'd been arrested for the theft and put in the village lock-up," he added indignantly.

"I guess you're right," admitted his chum.

"Of course I'm right. Didn't he give you away to his father the moment he spied you hid down in the hold of the canal-boat?"

"He certainly did, and I think I could have thrashed him for it if I'd had the chance. I felt like doing it."

"And my fists just tingled to get a rap at him, too," blurted Joe.

"He's in a pretty bad hole now, all right. If we can prevent this burglary to-night, it is possible we can save him from some of the consequences of his foolishness."

"I shouldn't think you'd care to waste much consideration on a fellow who for years treated you as mean as Luke has done," said Joe, in some surprise.

"I don't say he deserves anything of me, but still I'm willing to do what I can to save him from going to prison," said Dick, generously.

"Well, I don't know what you expect to do. You're the captain and I'm going it blind after you. But if you've a scheme for catching these fellows, and we do catch them,

I suppose Luke could turn State's evidence and escape the penalty."

"Very likely."

"I'm sorry you are getting mixed up in this matter," said Joe, gloomily.

"Why so?" said Dick, looking at his companion in surprise. "You wouldn't stand off and allow that old man to be robbed when you might be able to prevent it, would you?"

"I don't mean that; but you forget that we are liable to be detained as witnesses if a capture is made, and that will give Silas Maslin a chance to get hold of you again."

Dick stopped short and regarded his chum for a moment in silence.

He had not thought of that unpleasant contingency.

"This will make a slight change in my plans," he said, suddenly. "I intended to get help to tackle these fellows, but I think now it will do as well if we succeed in scaring them off. I'm satisfied if we can put a spoke in their wheel, and it will do away with the difficulty you mentioned."

To this plan Joe agreed with alacrity.

The sky, which had been overcast up to this point, now began to show through here and there in patches.

And ere long the imprisoned moon sailed into these spaces, and her light occasionally illuminated the landscape.

One of these spells of moonshine showed the boys the distant spire of the Jayville Methodist Church and the roofs of many of the houses.

"The Fairclough mansion is over yonder," said Dick, pointing in the direction. "I remember Mr. Maslin pointing it out to me a year ago, when we drove down here one day on business. We'll cut across this meadow and save at least two miles by the road."

On the other side of the field was a clump of trees.

Dick pointed out a couple of branches that would make stout cudgels, and he and Joe were presently in possession of a pair of serviceable weapons.

As they cautiously drew near the Revolutionary relic they made out three indistinct figures hovering about the building.

Suddenly the figures clustered about a rear window that was high above their reach, and Dick and Joe saw one of them mount on the shoulders of the other two and commence operations by splintering the glass with a blow of some implement.

At that interesting juncture the boys' ears caught the sound of approaching wheels, and before they realized what was about to happen a miserable-looking buggy, drawn by a thin, bony mare, dashed into the unkempt driveway and rattled up to the porch.

The occupant of the ramshackle vehicle showed up in the moonlight to be an old man of at least eighty years, wrapped in a faded green overcoat, with a comforter of some indescribable color tucked about his throat, the ends floating in the night air.

His approach had been discovered by the would-be burg-

lars, and the two who had formed the base of the pyramid that had just boosted the third through the fractured window, rushed around to the front of the house and attacked the old man from two sides.

"That must be Adam Fairclough," explained Dick, he and Joe springing to their feet. "He must have met somebody on the road who told him that his brother wasn't dead, and thus aroused his suspicions that something was wrong at this end of the business, and so he came right back. Those rascals may kill him if we don't interfere, Joe. So, come on. Let's take them by surprise."

Thereupon both boys leaped the fence and, flourishing their cudgels, rushed to the rescue.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DICK AND JOE BLOCK MUDGETT AND TIM BUNKER'S SHADY ENTERPRISE.

Mudgett had seized the old miser by the arm and was dragging him out of the buggy when Dick Armstrong sprang upon him like a young tiger and bore him to the ground. At the same instant Joe Fletcher ran around the vehicle and hit Tim Bunker such a whack over the head with his cudgel that the Walkhill youth saw unnumbered stars and hastened to make his escape over the back of the buggy.

But Joe cut him off, and the two boys were soon mixing it up pretty lively, with all the advantage in Joe's favor.

In the meantime Dick found Mudgett a tough proposition to get away with, while the bearded man discovered in the strong and active boy a hard nut to crack.

Old Adam Fairclough, thus relieved of his assailants, stood helplessly aloof, and watched the struggle that was going on about him.

He seemed to be utterly bewildered by the condition of affairs that had faced him on his return home.

And while this lively scrimmage was going on in the front of the house, Luke Maslin in the rear took advantage of the opportunity to scramble out of the window through which he had been forced to effect an entrance, and, reaching the ground, he took to his heels and made off into the line of woods beyond the fence as fast as his heels would carry him.

"Let me up, you young imp!" exclaimed Mudgett, panting for breath after several ineffectual efforts on his part to dislodge Dick from an advantageous position on his chest.

"Do you give in?" asked the almost equally breathless boy, refusing to budge an inch from his perch.

"No, hang you for a meddlesome little monkey! But if you don't let me up, I'll break your head!"

"I don't think you will, Mr. Mudgett," answered Dick, stoutly.

"You know my name, eh? Who the dickens are you, anyway?" said the rascal in a tone that showed his surprise.

"Never mind who I am," returned the lad. "I've got you dead to rights now, so you might just as well throw up your hands at once."

"Not on your life!" gritted Mudgett, renewing the struggle.

But he might just as well have saved his strength, for Joe having mastered Tim Bunker and bound his arms behind his back with the whip-lash belonging to the buggy, now came to his chum's assistance, and Mudgett, with a villainous scowl, gave up the fight and suffered himself to be secured with one of the traces which Joe took off the horse.

"I'm afraid these men meant to kill me, thinking I had money," said old Adam Fairclough to Dick, in trembling tones, when the lad stepped up to assure him that he no longer was in danger of molestation. "But I'm a poor old man. Poor—very poor."

"They were in the act of breaking into your house to rob you when we turned up, intending to prevent them carrying out their plan, which I fortunately overheard."

"Why should they want to rob me when I'm only a poor old man?" cried the miser, in a pathetic voice.

"They think you have lots of money hidden in your house," replied Dick.

"Not a cent—not a single cent!" wailed the old man, beating the air with his arms in a sort of abject denial.

Dick of course believed Adam Fairclough was not telling the truth.

He had always heard people say the man was worth thousands of dollars.

That he owned half a dozen good farms which he rented out to thrifty tenants.

That he held mortgages on a dozen more.

That he had a strong-box filled with family plate that had not been used for fifty years, and a second one stuffed with gold and banknotes he had taken out of circulation in order to hoard up for the mere pleasure of accumulation.

Probably the old man's wealth was greatly exaggerated, but there seemed little doubt that he was tolerably rich.

Dick led him around to the back of the house and showed him the broken window.

"They sent you a letter saying your brother William in Walkhill was dead; isn't that so?" asked the boy.

"Yes, yes; but it was false—my brother is not dead at all."

"That was a trick to get you away from here so they might search the house during your absence."

Then Dick told him the whole story of what he had learned at the old deserted farmhouse.

"You are a good boy—a brave boy," said the poor old miser, shaking the lad by the hand in a pitiful way, for he appeared to have but little strength after the shock he had sustained. "If I wasn't so very, very poor, I'd reward you."

"Don't worry about that," replied Dick, with a cheerfulness that put the old man more at his ease. "If you'll let us stay here for the rest of the night, it's all we want."

"You shall stay—yes, yes, you shall stay; but there isn't anything I could give you to eat. I'm so poor I can't buy much."

From the appearance of both his horse as well as himself it was evident the miser didn't squander much of his money on food of any kind.

They were both shrivelled and dried up like a pair of animated mummies.

Indeed, when Dick led the animal off to its stable he almost fancied he could hear its bones rattle with each step it took.

"Poor old beast!" he murmured sympathetically. "How I'd like to give you one good, square meal! But I fear the shock of it would lay you out."

And the mare, as if it understood him, looked at him with her saucer-like eyes in hopeless resignation.

Such a thing as a square meal to her was a dream, never to be realized.

The old man wouldn't have the prisoners taken into the mansion.

He was afraid of them, and so Joe tied them securely to posts in the stable.

Inside the house there were bolts and bars without number.

Every room appeared to be completely furnished, but the old-fashioned mahogany pieces, that must have been valuable in their day long ago, were now given over to the ravages of dust and neglect.

Adam Fairclough ate and slept in one little room at the top of the building, of which the boys caught only a momentary glimpse as the old man led them past to another room in which were a bed, some chairs, and other articles in a fair state of preservation.

There the miser left them after assuring Dick once more that he was miserably poor and sorry he couldn't do better by them.

"Gee!" grinned Joe when they were alone, "what a liar the old fellow is!"

"Never mind, old man," replied his chum. "It's none of our business. We've done our duty, and I can sleep like a top on the strength of it. There's one thing I'm glad about—Luke Maslin has skipped."

Next morning old Fairclough produced some weak boiled coffee and a plate of hard bread and cheese, which he offered to them for breakfast with every evidence of earnest hospitality, repeating his refrain of abject poverty.

He wrote down the boys' names in a big, leather-bound book, making a large cross opposite Dick's name.

When they went out to the stable to look after Mudgett and Tim Bunker they were surprised to find that the rascals had managed to liberate themselves somehow and had taken French leave.

The boys didn't know whether to be glad or sorry, but, on the whole, they were pleased to find they would not have to appear against the housebreakers.

Then they bade the old man good-bye, advising him to be very careful against any future attempts of a like nature.

They reached the deserted farm about nine o'clock, looked after the horses, made their stomachs happy with a substantial meal, and then hied themselves to the nutting-

ground, where they spent most of the day gathering up the remainder of the crop.

Not knowing but they might possibly be surprised by the fugitives, Mudgett and Tim Bunker, if they passed the night in the house, they left the place before dark and put up at Farmer Haywood's for supper and a bed.

Next day they arrived back in Albany and disposed of their final load of nuts, the whole speculation netting them the sum of \$375.

That same afternoon Dick sold the team for nearly \$400.

"I think we can afford to take the train for New York," he said after figuring up his cash capital, which he found amounted to \$850.

And Joe readily agreed with him, for he had \$155 tucked snugly away in an inside pocket.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### WRECK AND RESCUE.

"Gee! She's a beaut, isn't she, Dick?"

The Buffalo Express, on board of which Dick Armstrong and his friend, Joe Fletcher, were traveling to New York, had just stopped at Poughkeepsie, and the exclamation was drawn from Joe by the appearance in the car of a lovely young girl of apparently fifteen years of age, accompanied by a fine-looking gentleman of perhaps forty, who seemed to be her father.

"She is pretty, for a fact," admitted Dick, casting a look of admiration at the young lady.

She had light hair, blue eyes, and dimpled cheeks, and her smile was an entrancing one as she turned to say something to the gentleman when he seated himself by her side.

The train soon started on again and was presently speeding down the bank of the Hudson River at a fifty-mile clip.

It was a dull afternoon early in November, and the landscape looked brown and unpicturesque.

The great river flowed sluggishly along, and as they passed a string of canal-boats preceded by a snorting tug, the boys thought of Captain Beasley and the Minnehaha.

During the next hour a large portion of Dick's attention was centred on the pretty girl who had boarded the train at Poughkeepsie.

"Ever hear of Spuyten Duyvil?" asked Joe.

"Yes," answered Dick.

"It's not far above Manhattan Island, and we'll pass there soon. Guess I'll have another drink."

Joe went to the end of the car where the tank was, but whether his numerous drinks since leaving Albany had used up all the water, or because there was something the matter with the cock, certain it is Joe had to go into the next car to get what he wanted.

He had probably been gone a couple of minutes and Dick was watching the pretty stranger for perhaps the hundredth time, when something startling occurred which changed the whole aspect of affairs in the twinkling of an eye.

A tremendous shock stopped the train's momentum and piled the cars on top of each other, hurling a couple down

the embankment into the river, almost every car becoming a shapeless wreck, and human beings, full of life and hope a moment before, were suddenly ushered into eternity or maimed and mangled for life.

It was a rear-end collision.

A terrible scene was presented to Dick's gaze when he recovered his scattered senses.

He was stunned by the shock and made giddy by the wild vaulting of the car as it leaped the rails, swung around and buried its read end in the Hudson.

He was bruised and badly shaken up, but he was not seriously injured.

Fortunately Dick was endowed with a remarkable degree of self-possession.

Finding he was not hurt, he struggled out from beneath the wreckage which had overwhelmed him.

His first thought was for Joe, but the boy was not in sight, which, under the circumstances, was hardly to be wondered at.

Then the groans and screams of the mangled passengers pinned under the wreck confused him and distracted his attention from his chum.

Perhaps it is not strange that the fair young girl who had occupied the opposite seat in the car came to his mind, for his eyes and thoughts had been upon her at the moment of the catastrophe.

He did not see her among the men and women who were disengaging themselves from the shapeless debris.

"Is she dead?" he almost groaned, as he thought of that golden head and lithe figure smashed beyond recognition.

Then he wondered if her father had escaped, for, like Joe, he had a short time before the accident gone forward into the smoking-car, and the boy saw as through a mist the locomotive, express-baggage, and smoking cars back slowly down on the wreck, a crowd of wild and excited passengers tumbling off the rear platform of the latter.

It was impossible for anyone to say just what had caused the trouble, but it might have been a broken axle or a suddenly loosened rail that had snapped the connection between the cars.

A portion of the top of the car Dick had just wriggled from under lay near him, and seeing a woman's foot exposed beneath, he exerted his strength and raised one end a bit.

It rested heavily upon the form of the fair passenger from Poughkeepsie.

The sight aroused all his energies.

With desperate eagerness he put his shoulder to the heavy fragment that was crushing out the girl's life, and shifted it aside.

Then he bent down and lifted her in his arms.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, anxiously, "I believe she is dead."

She looked the picture of death, for her eyes were closed and her pallid cheek was stained with blood.

Dick, hardly knowing what to do, bore her down to the river edge and splashed the water into her face, eagerly watching for some sign of returning animation.

He rubbed her temples and chafed her hands, but the task seemed hopeless.

He was about to abandon his efforts in despair, when an almost imperceptible sigh gladdened his heart and caused him to renew his exertions.

With his handkerchief he washed away the bloodstains, and found that she was only slightly cut just above the ear.

In a few moments she recovered consciousness and cast a bewildered glance around her.

She tried to raise herself, but with a little cry of pain she sank back in Dick's arms and lay there staring up into his face and scarcely comprehending what he was doing for her.

Suddenly the fearful nature of the catastrophe dawned upon her mind, and clutching at the lad's arm with one little hand, her other arm lying limp and helpless at her side, she raised up again.

"My father!" she cried with pathetic earnestness. "Where is he?"

"I saw him leave you and go into the next car before the crash came," said Dick.

"He went to the smoking-car," she moaned. "Perhaps—oh, perhaps he was—"

"If he reached the smoking-car, he is safe," said Dick, encouragingly. "That car was not damaged. I can see it from here," and the boy nodded his head in the direction where it stood on the track. "And I see your father now!" he exclaimed suddenly. "He is running this way. What is your name?"

"Jennie Nesbitt," she replied faintly.

"Hi, hi! Mr. Nesbitt!" cried Dick, motioning to the girl's father.

The gentleman started and paused when he heard his name pronounced.

Looking wildly about he saw Dick signaling to him, and he easily guessed that the recumbent figure in the boy's arms was his daughter, and he rushed down to the spot.

"Don't say she is dead!" he exclaimed frantically, the tears streaming down his cheeks. "Jennie, darling, speak to your father!" and he knelt down and seized her nerveless hand.

A cry of pain broke from the girl.

"Are you much hurt, my darling?" asked Mr. Nesbitt, anxiously, taking her in his arms and kissing her tenderly.

"I don't know, father," she answered faintly, putting her uninjured arm around his neck. "My left arm is very numb."

"I should be obliged to you if you would assist me in carrying my daughter up this bank," said the gentleman to Dick.

Between them they carried her across the tracks and laid her on the faded grass under the trees, where a score or more of the injured had already been placed to await the attention of the physicians that had been telegraphed for.

"Can I be of any further use?" asked Dick, wistfully, after he had explained how he discovered the young lady under the section of the car-roof and removed her to the

waterside in the hope of bringing her to. "I should like to hunt up my chum, who was traveling with me."

"I will not detain you," said Mr. Nesbitt, grasping him by the hand. "You have been very good to my daughter. She probably owes her life to you. I can never sufficiently thank you for the service you have this day rendered to me," he said with grateful earnestness.

"I am glad I was able to do something for your daughter," replied Dick, simply.

"Be sure we shall not forget you. I think you said your name was Richard Armstrong?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will not forget that, Jennie. Here is my business card, Mr. Armstrong. You must call at my office, for we want to know you better."

"Thank you; I will do so at the first chance," replied the boy, noticing that the address was a New York City one.

"Perhaps I shall see you again before you leave here."

"We shall be glad if you come back as soon as you find some trace of your friend, who, I think, probably has escaped, since, like myself, you say he went forward before the accident occurred."

The wounded and the dead were now being rapidly taken from the pile of ruins by those who were uninjured.

Dick, gazing upon the work of the rescuers, saw Joe helping like a good fellow to clear away a part of the splintered car in which he and his chum had been riding.

With a shout of joy Dick ran up and seized him by the arm.

"Thank goodness, you're safe!" he said, delightedly.

"Gee wilikens!" cried Joe, throwing his arms about him in a spasm of pleasure. "I was almost certain you were a goner. How did you manage to get out of this ruin without a scratch? Why, it's a perfect miracle! Half the car is smashed into toothpicks."

For an hour Dick and Joe worked hard to help the unfortunates who had suffered from the wreck.

By that time the force of doctors sent from New York had arrived and were helping the half-dozen local practitioners who had previously been brought to the scene of the disaster.

There being nothing for Dick and his chum to do, the former thought he would like to know how the young lady he had assisted was getting on.

He found Mr. Nesbitt and his daughter in the same spot, and presented Joe to them.

They were glad to learn that Dick had found his friend uninjured.

A surgeon had set Miss Jennie's broken arm, which was beginning to pain her a good deal.

One of the train hands now came up and said they had better board one of the cars of the relief train which was about to start for the metropolis.

Miss Nesbitt said she thought she could walk as far as the car if Dick and her father supported her.

She was made as comfortable on one of the seats as circumstances permitted, and in a few minutes the train

started with its melancholy load of maimed, dead, and dying.

At the Grand Central Station a carriage was obtained by Dick to take the injured young miss and her father home.

The girl bade the lad a grateful good-bye and exacted a promise that he would call and see her at her home very soon.

"And don't forget I shall expect to see you at my office in a day or two," said Mr. Nesbitt as the vehicle drove off.

"Gee!" said Joe as they watched the carriage disappear around the corner. "You may have done a big thing for yourself for all you know, Dick, old boy. You've made yourself solid in that quarter, all right. And a good friend goes a long way in this city sometimes. Come along, now. I'll pilot you down to my old boarding-place."

Whereupon they walked to Third Avenue and took a southbound car.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### DICK BUYS AN INVENTION THAT PROVES TO BE A WINNER.

Although Dick Armstrong had lived in the country all his life, and Albany was the biggest town he had heretofore seen, still the great city of New York did not overwhelm him by its immensity.

He was a level-headed boy and believed in taking things as they came.

Of course he found lots to interest and astonish him, but that was only what he had expected.

He and Joe spent three days taking in the sights of the city, which of course were quite familiar to the latter, and then Dick decided to call on Mr. Nesbitt.

That gentleman was a well-known lawyer, and his office was in a big skyscraper on lower Broadway.

It rather took Dick's breath away when he was whisked up to the sixteenth story in an express elevator, yet nobody would have judged from his manner but that he was accustomed to the trip.

"Second corridor to your left," said the elevator man to Dick, and the boy, following this direction, had no trouble in finding the offices of "George Nesbitt, Attorney and Counsellor-at-Law," who occupied a suite of handsomely furnished rooms, from the windows of which a splendid view of the bay and the two rivers was to be had.

The lawyer extended a warm greeting to his young visitor.

"My daughter is doing very nicely, everything considered," he said. "You must not delay calling on us; she will be very glad to see you again."

"I shall be happy to do so," answered Dick.

"Then why not come to-morrow evening? You have our address."

This suited the boy, and the matter was so arranged.

Then Mr. Nesbitt asked Dick about his prospects.

The lad gave him a brief outline of his past life at Cobham's Corner and what he had done since he broke away from Silas Maslin.

The lawyer was impressed with the boy's earnestness and

business sagacity and determined to help him on the road to success.

"How would you like employment in my office?" he said. "I do not mean as a clerk. I think I can use you in a way that will develop your natural business talents. I have control of several extensive estates. A young man of your ability can be made useful to me in many ways, and the experience will be of great value to yourself. You are young. The world is before you. The obligations under which you have placed me by your attention to my only child under the most trying of circumstances make me desirous of interesting myself in your future career. Will you give me the opportunity of doing so?"

Dick was both surprised and pleased at the proposition, and he accepted it at once.

Mr. Nesbitt seemed gratified by the lad's acquiescence, and he explained to Dick what his immediate duties would be.

"I should be glad if you will start in to-morrow," he said, finally, and the boy was told to be at the office at half-past nine on the following morning.

That evening he and Joe went down on Water Street and had supper with Captain Beasley and his family on board the Minnehaha.

"So far as obtaining employment is concerned," remarked the skipper as he took down, filled and lit his briar-root pipe, "you two lads seem to have started on even terms, both of you having got a job to-day; it now remains to be seen which will pull out ahead."

"Oh, there isn't any doubt about that," replied Joe, heartily. "I take my hat off to my friend Dick first, last, and always."

"Come, Joe, you're laying it on thick, aren't you?" laughed his chum.

"Not on your life. I'll leave it to Captain Beasley. Five weeks ago you left the Corner with a measly sixteen dollars in your pocket; to-night you could count out eight hundred and fifty made by your business smartness, and I have one hundred and fifty acquired through my connection with you. We are not in the same class, old chappie. I haven't got your head. If I had, I'd back myself to win a million in a year or two."

Dick spent his first day in Mr. Nesbitt's office learning many of the details connected with real estate management, and that evening he visited the lawyer's family, on West Seventy-second Street, where he received a warm welcome from Jennie and Mrs. Nesbitt, who was an invalid.

After that he became a regular visitor, and Miss Jennie introduced him into her own particular set, in which his winning manners and good looks soon established him a first favorite.

One of the estates Mr. Nesbitt had charge of was situated about thirty miles out on Long Island, and Dick went there once a week to attend to business matters in connection with its management.

He was returning one afternoon on a Long Island Railroad train when a young man bog animal car at a way

station and took the only vacant seat, which was alongside Dick.

He looked to be a bright fellow, with a frank, ingenuous countenance that naturally inspired confidence; but he looked pale and weak as though recovering from a long illness.

Dick got into conversation with him, and soon found out he was an Englishman, who had come to America more than a year before after having been thrown on his own resources by the death of his only relative.

He had not been successful in securing steady employment, and subsequent illness had brought him down to bed-rock.

How he was going to get on, he hadn't a very clear idea.

"If I only had a few dollars," he said sadly as he gazed through the car window at the bleak, wintry prospect, "I feel sure I could get on my feet."

"Then you're broke, are you?" asked Dick, sympathetically.

"Flat," admitted the young Englishman, in a dejected voice.

"That's tough."

"Yes, it is. It is strange how hard luck follows a fellow. I'll show you something I invented just before I was taken down with the gastric fever. It's a good idea, and since I got out of the hospital I've been trying to sell a half-interest for a hundred dollars so I can get it patented. But nobody seems to see any money in it."

The young stranger put his hand in his pocket and drew out a well-worn pocket-book.

From this he produced a descriptive drawing of a new idea in water-coolers.

"This is entirely different from anything on the market," he said, "and if manufactured and properly pushed, I don't see why it shouldn't sell well. You see, the water is kept entirely separate from the ice, which is chopped up, mixed with rock salt on the same principle as that used and packed around an ice-cream can. The ice preparation is put in here, the space indicated by I, the water in here, which is simply a galvanized receptacle which can be removed when the cooler is to be cleaned out and recharged. The advantages of this scheme are that you can use filtered water or any special kind of spring water—in fact any kind of fluid—and keep it cold without direct contact with or contamination from the ice itself."

"The idea isn't bad," said Dick thoughtfully, as he studied the diagram carefully. "You want one hundred dollars for a half-interest?"

"I would dispose of a half-interest for that amount in order to get the money necessary to patent it."

"Suppose you let me have this drawing for a few days. Here is my employer's business address. That is my name printed in the corner. If I find there is likely to be any money in this thing, I'll give you fifty dollars for a half-interest and stand the expense of patenting it myself. What do you say?"

"I agree to that," said the Englishman, eagerly. "When shall I call on you?"

"Next Saturday about noon."

"All right."

Dick put the drawing into his pocket.

"I'll let you have five dollars on account now, as you probably need the money," he said, offering his new acquaintance a bill of that denomination. "If I don't take up the scheme I won't require you to return me the fiver."

"That's generous of you," said the other, earnestly. "Meeting you is the first stroke of luck I've had for months."

"Don't be too sure of that," replied Dick, cautiously. "There may be nothing in it, after all."

Then they talked of other matters till the train arrived at the Flatbush Avenue Station, where they parted, Dick taking an electric car over the bridge for New York.

That night he showed the drawing to Joe, who roomed with him, and together they discussed the feasibility of the scheme proving a paying one.

Dick had a shrewd idea that a manufacturer of water-coolers was the best persons to consult on the project, and next day called on one who happened to be a personal friend of Mr. Nesbitt.

The idea struck the manufacturer favorably.

He called his manager in, and they figured out the cost of the article on the lines presented by Dick.

"What will you sell the patent for?" asked the manufacturer.

"You can have my half-interest for twenty-five hundred dollars," was Dick's reply, "and I dare say I can arrange to get you the other half at the same figure."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the manufacturer, after considering the matter. "I'll build these coolers and place them on the market, allowing you a royalty of from twenty-five to fifty cents, according to size, on every one actually sold."

"Will you give me a memorandum, in writing, to that effect and allow me a few days to consider your offer?"

"Certainly." And the gentleman did so and handed the paper to Dick. "You will accept that as a thirty-day option on the patent."

"Very well," said the boy, rising and bidding him good day.

Dick went at once to Munn & Co. and made application for a patent covering the specifications set forth by the young Englishman, entering the same in both their names.

When the inventor called on Saturday he handed him \$45, taking in return a bill of sale for half the patent rights on the cooler.

Then he told the Englishman of the offer he had had from the manufacturer, and advised that they take up with it.

"It is better than I expected to do with it," replied the inventor, "but I don't feel as though I could wait for the realization of such good luck. I want to get back to England. I am homesick here. Do you think the whole thing is worth five hundred dollars to you? Will you take that much risk on its success after it has been put on the market? If you will, give me four hundred and fifty more,

and I will make out a new bill of sale giving you the sole right to the invention."

"Wait a moment," said Dick, and he went inside and had a consultation with Mr. Nesbitt.

The result was that Dick bought the invention outright.

On the following Monday he went to the manufacturer and made a contract with him on the terms proposed.

Although the boy did not then dream of the ultimate results of this deal, we may say now that the coolers were ready and put on the market in time for the summer trade.

They were a novelty, took splendidly, and in the end Dick disposed of the patent rights to the manufacturer for \$5,000 cash.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A NERVOY VENTURE AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

One day toward the end of March, Dick was taking lunch in a Fulton Street chop-house when two well-dressed men entered the place and sat down at the opposite side of the table.

They were talking about some real estate deal they had in contemplation, and did not appear to regard the boy's presence as a bar to their conversation.

"We can get a thirty-day option on the property for one thousand dollars, pending examination of title," said the shorter man of the two, after the waiter had taken their order. The old man's bed-rock price for the entire thirty acres is twelve thousand cash. He wanted fifteen thousand at first. Allowing for streets, we can get out of it twelve city lots per acre, or three hundred and sixty lots altogether. The corner lots will fetch one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and fifty dollars each, and the inside ones, say one hundred, according to location. That means we should realize about forty thousand dollars in the gross. You have figured out the expense of cutting through the streets, the cost of having the title guaranteed, probable cost of printing and newspaper advertising, commissions to agents, and so forth. The location of the property is good; the Long Island main line has a station close by, and the main street of Sodom can be extended through the property. Old man Durwood is clearly anxious to sell, or he wouldn't let it go at that figure. It is easily worth sixteen thousand dollars to us as it stands, and I would give that for it sooner than let it slip through my hands."

"It's a good speculation," said the tall man, nodding his head. "Thompson and Davis are in this with us, I believe."

"Thompson is ready to put up a certified check for his share at any moment. I will see and settle with Davis this afternoon. To-morrow morning I will go out to Sodom and get the option and the deed from Durwood."

The talk then branched off on the plans of the speculators for improving the property and putting it in shape for sale at lot prices.

Although Dick apparently paid no attention to what the real estate men were saying, nevertheless he was an interested listener to their conversation.

It happened that the Long Island estate to which the

lad made weekly visits was in the neighborhood of the village of Sodom.

He had a speaking acquaintance with Jonas Durwood, the owner of the thirty acres referred to above, and knew something about the property in question.

It had been on the market for some time.

Durwood had been offering it at \$15,000, one-third cash, balance on a five-year mortgage.

The four real estate men evidently intended purchasing the property at the reduced figure for spot cash, with the view of cutting it up into lots and then disposing of them at a good profit on the whole investment.

"So," thought Dick, "they would sooner give sixteen thousand than let it slip through their fingers. A thirty-day option on it can be had for a thousand. Well, I've got a thousand lying idle. What's the matter with my stealing a march on this syndicate of four, getting the option myself, and then make them come to terms with me. If they should refuse to deal with me, it might put me in a hole; but I guess Mr. Nesbitt would see me through, for that piece of ground is well worth fifteen thousand at any rate."

Dick thought he saw a fine chance to make \$3,000 or \$4,000 inside of a month if he took the thing on the fly.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained," he muttered as he drew near the office. "By the great horn spoon, I'll do it! My bank-book is upstairs. I'll draw the money and take it down with me to Sodom this afternoon, for fortunately this is the day I am due there. When that chap goes down to-morrow he'll find that someone else has got ahead of him. Gee! Won't he be hopping mad? Well, I guess!"

It was Dick's rule not to let the grass grow under his feet when he embarked in an enterprise.

Therefore he hustled to get his money, and left on an early afternoon train for Sodom.

He hunted up Jonas Durwood right away and made him a twelve-thousand-dollar cash offer for the thirty acres.

"What? what? You want to buy that ground, eh? Who for? Mr. Nesbitt?" said Durwood in some surprise.

"I want a thirty-day option and I want you to put it in my name. Here's a thousand dollars to bind the bargain. See?"

Jonas Durwood saw the bills, and the sight of them melted all further opposition he may have thought of advancing with a view of a better figure.

The preliminaries were settled on the spot.

Dick got the option and the deed to the property, and Durwood got ten one-hundred-dollar bills.

Both parties to the contract were satisfied.

"Now," said the boy, after the settlement had been effected, "there was a man down here negotiating with you for this land. Have you his name and address?"

"Yes," replied Durwood. "Do you want it?"

"I'd like to have it."

Mr. Durwood produced a card and handed it to Dick.

"Now, Mr. Durwood, if this man shows up here to-morrow, or any time soon, and he asks you who bought the property, just give him my card, will you?"

"Certainly," answered the Sodom resident.

Dick then left him and went over to the estate to attend to such business as awaited him there.

Next afternoon a very much excited individual called at Mr. Nesbitt's offices and inquired for Richard Armstrong.

It was the short, stout man who had done most of the talking at the restaurant.

Dick was out, and the man waited till he returned.

He was vastly surprised to find that the Armstrong he wanted was a boy.

"Did you purchase an option on Mr. Durwood's property at Sodom yesterday?" he inquired, in a nervous tone.

"Yes, sir; I did."

"For whom, may I ask?"

"For myself."

"What?" exclaimed the visitor, in amazement. "You secured an option on those thirty acres for yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you expect me to believe such a ridiculous story as that?" demanded the stout man, sarcastically. "Come, now, tell me who you represent?"

"I have told you. I represent myself. I bought those thirty acres because I found out I could get them at a low price. They're worth sixteen thousand dollars if they're worth a cent."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the man, impatiently.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Dick, coolly.

"I mean it is sheer nonsense for you to say that property is worth sixteen thousand dollars."

"Well, what do you think it is worth?"

"In my opinion, twelve thousand is nearer its value."

"We won't argue the matter. I hold a thirty-day option on the property. Is that all you wished to see me about?"

Dick was thoroughly cool and business-like, and the stout man seemed puzzled as to what he would say next.

"I'll tell you what," he said, presently. "I was looking at that piece of ground myself and had some idea of buying it. If you'd like to turn your option over to me, I'll give you five hundred dollars bonus."

Dick shook his head.

"No. Couldn't think of it."

"What will you take for the option?"

"Five thousand dollars cash!"

"Five thousand furies!" yelled the man, looking at the boy as though he would like to have eaten him.

"No, sir," said Dick, with a faint grin. "Not furies, but dollars."

"Young man, what do you take me for?"

Dick smiled pleasantly, but made no answer.

"I'll give you just two thousand dollars for that option."

"I can do better than that," replied the boy, politely.

"How can you?" asked the stout man, incredulously.

"A syndicate has been formed to buy that property for speculative purposes."

"What?" gasped the real estate man, staring hard at Dick.

"That's right. I don't mind telling you how I came to

buy the land. My business takes me down to Sodom once a week. I knew the Durwood property was in the market, and I have a very clear idea of its value. As soon as I got the tip that speculators were after it, I made up my mind to scoop the ground myself if I could get it low enough. I made Mr. Durwood a cash offer, and we came to an agreement. Mr. Nesbitt will examine the title in a few days, and if everything is all right he will close the deal as trustee for me. That's all there is to it."

"How did you learn about this syndicate and who are the men that compose it?" asked the stout man, with ill-disguised eagerness.

"You will have to excuse me answering those questions, Mr. Blake," replied Dick, looking at the man's card, which he held in his hand.

"Then you won't accept an offer of twenty-five hundred for your option?" said the visitor.

"No, sir. Any time within the thirty-day limit after Mr. Nesbitt has passed on the title, you or the syndicate or any other person can purchase that option for an advance of four thousand dollars over what I paid down."

"I will consider the matter, Mr. Armstrong. Good day."

A few days later Dick received an offer in writing from Mr. Blake, accepting his figure, contingent on Mr. Nesbitt's assurance that Jonas Durwood could furnish a clear title and that the same would be guaranteed by the Lawyer's Title Guarantee and Trust Company.

Dick closed with him on those terms, and a week before the option expired the delighted boy received a certified check for \$5,000, and the Blake crowd closed the deal and came into possession of the property.

It was not only a red-letter day in Dick's life, but his seventeenth birthday.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A NIGHT ATTACK AND A RECOGNITION.

Dick also celebrated his seventeenth birthday by taking Jennie Nesbitt to the Empire Theatre to see a famous actress in a favorite play.

"She's just splendid don't you think so?" said Jennie as they came out of the playhouse after the show.

"Fine," coincided Dick, enthusiastically. "Do you know, Miss Jennie, this is the third time in my entire life that I have attended a theatre?"

"Is it possible?" she answered in a surprised tone.

"That's right. The first week after I came to New York, Joe took me to the New Amsterdam Theatre. That was actually the very first time I ever was in a theatre. On the afternoon of Washington's Birthday I went over with Joe to Proctor's Fifth Avenue house. I've lived in the backwood, as they call it, the greater part of my seventeen years."

"I'm sure no one would think so by your appearance or your manners," said his charming companion. "You are not at all countrified."

"Thank you for the compliment. I have tried to adapt myself to my surroundings. Joe helped to break me in, and I am sure I am indebted to you for the polish."

It is very nice of you to say that," she answered, with a blush. "I am very glad indeed if I have helped you in any way."

"You have generously introduced me into your own sphere of society, and that is a privilege I might otherwise have wished for in vain. It gave me a chance to associate with well-bred and educated young persons of my own age, who as a rule have treated me very nicely. It was a great advantage to me to be under your wing, as it were, and I have improved it as much as possible. I was a pretty awkward fellow when you first knew me."

"Really, I don't think you ever were what I should call awkward," she said, with a smile, "though of course you were not *au fait*—that's French for instructed or expert—in city ways. But dear me! there isn't the slightest sign of hayseed about you now," and she laughed merrily.

"The credit then is all yours, Miss Jennie," said Dick, gallantly. "I'm afraid I'll never be able to repay——"

"Dick Armstrong!" cried the girl, suddenly putting her gloved hand across his mouth in an imperative sort of way. "You forget what I owe you—what papa and mamma owe you!"

"But think what your father has done—is doing for me right along, Miss Jennie. It was the assurance that he was at my back that enabled me to carry this real estate deal through and put five thousand dollars in my pocket."

"But papa did not originate nor engineer the transaction," persisted the girl. "Nor did he actually do more for you than any lawyer would have done, except that he did not charge you anything for investigating the title."

"Had the deal failed to go through, I should have lost my thousand dollars unless he came to my rescue, which I felt sure he would have done."

"Now, Dick—I'm going to call you Dick after this," she said, with a blush, "that is, between ourselves, you know, and I wish you would call me simply Jennie—you mustn't try to make me think you aren't smart. I know you are. Papa says so, and whatever papa says I'm accustomed to believe. He says you are bound to succeed. Now, I think you have already succeeded pretty well. You've never denied what your friend Mr. Fletcher——"

"You mean Joe?"

"Of course I mean him. What he said about you making eight hundred and fifty dollars in a month out of nothing just after you left that horrid Mr. Maslin. Then there's that water-cooler patent which hasn't cost you more than six hundred. Papa says the manufacturer who has taken it in hand told him it would net you several thousands of dollars in the long run. Then it wasn't a month after you had arranged that matter before you bought the patent rights to a typewriter improvement and sold it in a week to a manufacturer at a profit of nearly a thousand dollars. Oh, dear, no; you're not smart at all—of course not!"

What answer Dick might have made to the young lady's enthusiastic commendation of his business abilities was fated to remain unspoken, for at that moment a thrilling episode occurred that attracted their startled attention and in the end led up to a most remarkable climax.

They were walking through Forty-first Street from Broadway to Sixth Avenue to take the elevated train at the Forty-second Street station and had nearly reached the corner when a tall, fine-appearing gentleman turned into the street from Sixth Avenue and approached them.

Almost at the identical moment three figures rushed out of the doorway of the corner building, where they had evidently hidden, and sprang upon the gentleman.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that the intended victim was thrown to the sidewalk and would have been overpowered but for Dick, who, notwithstanding the fact that he had a young lady to protect, could not stand tamely by and witness such an outrage.

Confident of his own strength and agility, Dick left Miss Nesbitt's side and started for the struggling group.

He felled the foremost assailant with a stunning blow under the ear—and the boy could hit out mighty hard.

Then he sprang at the second, who he saw was a husky-looking boy with his cap pulled well down about his eyes.

He had just raised a sand-bag to stun the gentleman, but was forced to relinquish his cowardly purpose and turn and endeavor to defend himself.

But Dick's movements were quicker than lightning.

He had taken the attacking party just as much by surprise as they had taken their victim.

His hard, weather-tanned fist caught the young rascal on the point of the chin.

The fellow went down beside his dazed comrade, and from that moment he ceased to take any further interest in the proceedings.

This left only one more to be accounted for—another boy whose face was streaked with black as a kind of disguise—and the gentleman himself soon put him out of business.

This brought the affair to a satisfactory conclusion.

"I want to thank you, my brave lad, for coming to my assistance," said the stranger, shaking Dick warmly by the hand. "But for you I most certainly would have been knocked out and robbed."

"I am glad I was on hand to help you out," replied the stalwart boy, wiping specks of blood from his skinned knuckles.

"It was fortunate for me you were. You must come with me to my hotel. I can't let you off in this shabby manner."

"I am afraid you will have to excuse me," answered the boy, with a smile, "for I have a young lady yonder waiting for me to take her home."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the gentleman, in surprise.

"Come, Miss Jennie; the danger is all over," called Dick. And taking courage at this, Miss Nesbitt advanced from the shadow of the buildings a few yards away.

She regarded the three prostrate forms with a little shudder and took refuge close to her young escort.

"This is Miss Nesbitt," began Dick. "I beg your pardon, I don't know your name, sir."

"Armstrong," replied the gentleman, raising his hat politely to the girl.

"Why, that's my name!" cried the boy in surprise.

"Is it possible?" excl<sup>u</sup> boy with a new and, we may add, intense interest.

"Yes, sir; Richard Armstrong. Let me hand you my card."

The gentleman took it mechanically without removing his gaze from the lad's face.

"Richard Armstrong!" he repeated, showing for the first time intense emotion.

"Yes, sir; but I see these rascals are beginning to move. I think we had better get away before they recover their senses."

"Yes, do come," urged Jennie Nesbitt, nervously.

"It's a pity there isn't a policeman about to take them into custody," said Dick.

The boy with the blackened face at this point turned around and looked at Dick.

He gave a hoarse cry and almost grovelled at the lad's feet.

"Save me, Dick Armstrong! Save me!" he cried with a frantic eagerness that was really pitiful. "Don't you know me? I am Luke Maslin!"

Dick started as though he had trod on a live coal.

Then he seized the disguised boy by the shoulder and peered into his face.

He saw he was indeed the storekeeper's son.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### WHAT FINALLY COMES TO THE BOY WHO SUCCEEDED.

"Great Scott! Luke Maslin! What does this mean? You an associate of Tenderloin thugs! Is it possible you have got so low as this?" cried Dick, in indignant amazement.

"Save me!" almost shrieked Silas Maslin's son, in abject terror. "They made me what I am," and he pointed to the reviving rascals, who were no other than the man Mudgett and the Walkhill terror, Tim Bunker. "They won't let me go home! They make me do as they want! Oh, take me away from them!"

"You know this boy?" asked the gentleman who said his name was Armstrong, grabbing Dick by the arm in a state of almost uncontrollable agitation.

"Yes, sir."

"Did he not say his name was Maslin?"

"Yes, sir; that is his name. He is the son of the man with whom I lived almost all my life—Silas Maslin, of Cobham's Corner."

"Silas Maslin!" exclaimed the gentleman, in great excitement. "Did he not once live at Franconia, New Hampshire?"

"That's right. He did," replied Dick.

"And you are the boy who at the age of five was left in his care and never was called for?"

"Why—why, how did you know that?" asked Dick, in astonishment.

"Because I am the man who left you with Mr. Maslin. I am your father, George Armstrong, and you are the son I have searched for for years, but could gain no trace of.

the less a providential meeting.

He held out his arms to Dick, and the lad, though of course it could not be expected that he had retained any recollection of his parent, instinctively felt that this man was indeed the father he had long yearned to know, but hardly expected to see in this world.

Needless to say the two embraced right there in the street, to the silent wonder of Jennie Nesbitt and young Maslin, neither of whom quite comprehended the meaning of it all.

At this interesting juncture Mudgett sat up and stared around him like one recovering from an ugly dream, while almost at the same moment a big policeman came sauntering around the corner, swinging his club negligently to and fro as if such a thing as trouble on his beat was very far from his thoughts.

Luke saw him at once and started to run, but Mr. Armstrong blocked his way.

"Don't let him arrest me!" he begged, appealing to Dick.

"Take this card and call upon me to-morrow, and I will see that you get home to your people," he replied. "Let him go—father."

It was the first time he had addressed Mr. Armstrong by that title, and it sounded strange on his lips.

The gentleman stepped aside, and Luke flew up the street like a frightened deer.

This strange proceeding attracted the officer's attention, and he got active and alert at once.

He approached the group at a quick gait.

"Officer," said Mr. Armstrong, in a commanding tone, "arrest these two rascals. They assaulted me with intent to rob. I am stopping at the Normandie and will appear against them in the morning. Here is my card."

"How about that fellow running up the street?" asked the policeman, sharply.

"Never mind him. You couldn't overtake him now."

"I'll have to ask you to step around with us to the station," said the officer as he jerked the reviving Tim Bunker to his feet with one hand and with the other secured a strong grasp on Mudgett's coat collar.

"Very well," acquiesced Mr. Armstrong, with no little reluctance. "Come to the Hotel Normandie, my son, after you have taken the young lady home."

"I will, father."

"Why, Dick!" exclaimed Jennie, when they were once more alone and headed for the elevated station again. "Please tell me what this means. Is this gentleman really your father? I thought you told us your father was dead."

"So I did, and so I supposed he was," replied the boy, whose feelings were a mixture of joy and bewilderment over this strange and unexpected discovery.

And on the way to her home, in Seventy-second Street, he told her what he had learned about his parentage from the old diary once kept by Silas Maslin, which he had found in the attic of the storekeeper's house at Cobham's Corner.

"It was but a bare outline of one short week in my young life's history," he said in conclusion, "but it gave me the

My parentage—the secret the Maslins never divulged for reasons of their own. But I shall soon know all. Yes,” cried the boy, tears of wistful eagerness stealing into his fine eyes, “to-night before I sleep I shall know who my mother was—for something tells me she is not alive—that she died long, long ago, probably about the time my father carried me to Franconia.”

Jennie was much affected and treated him with a sympathetic gentleness that warmed his heart toward her more than ever.

“You must bring your father to see us, Dick, very soon. Remember, we are all interested in you and whatever concerns you. You will do this, won’t you?” she said, laying her hand on his arm as they stood at the outside entrance of her home.

“Yes,” said the boy, with glistening eyes, “I will. He will be glad to know those who have been so kind to me. Do you know,” he cried with impetuous suddenness, “I wish you were my sister?”

“Do you?” said Jennie, blushing like a rose and suddenly looking down.

“Yes, I do.”

Perhaps he did, but that was because he didn’t know any better just then.

He thought differently later on—but that is another story.

However, in the excitement of the moment, and, considering what he had just passed through he might well excuse, he did a very audacious thing.

He actually kissed Jennie Nesbitt then and there.

Then, realizing the enormity of his offence, he blurted out a hasty “Good night!” and flew down the stoop, leaving the lovely little blonde in a state of happy confusion we will not attempt to describe.

An hour later Dick was seated with his father in an elegant room on the third floor of the Hotel Normandie, listening to the story that father had to tell.

As Dick had guessed, his mother was dead.

She had passed away on the eve of a financial panic in Boston which had wrecked his father’s business and temporarily clouded his name with a suspicion of unfair commercial methods.

Nearly crazed by the loss of his wife, not to mention his business reverses, Mr. Armstrong in the first days of his misery fled to the recesses of New Hampshire, taking his only boy with him.

“I was shortly summoned back from Franconia by a committee of my creditors, with whom I succeeded in making a partial arrangement contingent on the success of certain mining interests I had in the West,” said Mr. Armstrong. “I sent Mr. Maslin one hundred dollars to defray your board for a certain length of time, for I could not return to you immediately as it was urgently necessary I should go at once to Colorado. Afterward I sent him other sums from the West for a like purpose. It was five years before I found myself able to return East. While not rich, I had done very well and my prospects were bright, my

been entirely wiped out. When I went to Franconia I found the Maslins had moved away a short time before, leaving no clue to their new address, and from that hour to this day I never obtained a clue, even by the assistance of paid detectives, to their new home.”

“And yet, father, all the time they were living at Cobham’s Corner, on the Erie Canal, and I was living with them, not as a boy whose board had ever been paid, but as a friendless slave of never-ending toil,” said Dick, more indignant than ever at the unfair treatment he had experienced at the hands of Silas Maslin and his wife.

“The unfeeling rascal!” exclaimed Mr. Armstrong. “But he and I will have a reckoning that will not tend to his advantage.”

Notwithstanding this new phase of Mr. Maslin’s duplicity, Dick did not fail to give Luke, his wayward son, the necessary money to take him home, when that repentant young man called to see him next morning at Mr. Nesbitt’s offices.

Probably the most excited as well as delighted young fellow in New York next day was Joe Fletcher when his stanch friend and chum told him the news that he had actually found his father—now a millionaire mine-owner.

“I never was so glad at anything in my whole life, Dick, old boy,” he cried, with a beaming face. And then he stopped, and his countenance suddenly clouded. “Perhaps a seven-dollar-a-week produce clerk is hardly a fit companion for the son of the wealthy Mr. Armstrong. It will break my heart to lose you, Dick, but at least it will be a satisfaction to know you’ve reached your proper station.”

“Don’t you talk nonsense, Joe,” said Dick, grasping his hand with a feeling that could not be mistaken. “Chums we’ve been in adversity, and so shall we remain in the days when prosperity has overtaken one of us at least. Glad as I am to recover my father, I am proud to say that, without any help from him and but little in a business sense from even Mr. Nesbitt, I have succeeded in making my way to the front, even if I am only seventeen years old.”

“That’s right,” agreed Joe, fervently.

And there were others who also coincided with this opinion, the Nesbitts, for instance, and Jennie more than her parents, for a few years later she gave her hand where she had long since given her heart—to Dick Armstrong, the BOY WHO SUCCEEDED.

THE END.

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" 3.—A Corner in Corn; or, How a Chicago Boy Did the Trick	- - - - -	" " 20
" 4.—A Game of Chance; or, The Boy Who Won Out	- - - - -	" " 2
" 5.—Hard to Beat; or, The Cleverest Boy in Wall Street	- - - - -	" Nov.
" 6.—Building a Railroad; or, The Young Contractors of Lakeview	- - - - -	" " 1
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